

Making Change in Quality of Higher Education in Bangladesh: Does HEQEP Matter

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the role and effect of the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (hereafter used as HEQEP) in enhancing the quality of higher education (QHE) in Bangladesh focused on the University of Rajshahi. To examine the role and effect of HEQEP, the study has been conducted by following three specific objectives: i) To assess the technological and infrastructure change and development for enhancing institutional capacity; ii) To assess the training programs and initiatives have been taken under HEQEP for professional skill development of academic staff; and iii) To assess the change and development of the curriculum, and academic results of the students. The research is qualitative but some quantitative data have been used. Therefore, both secondary and primary data have been used to conduct this study. Primary data have been collected by using semi-structured questionnaires (both open and close-ended) and Interview techniques. Secondary data have been collected by documentary studies. In this study, some explicit positive changes and improvements have been found in the infrastructure of the selected departments but not adequate and sufficient. Similarly, limited positive changes have been found in professional skills but no qualitative change has been found in overall quality of academic curriculum, result and staff performance. Therefore, HEQEP is not enough for ensuring the quality of higher education. Besides, several factors are responsible for the quality of higher education like the socio-cultural background, political stability, budget allocation, recruitment policy of the university, the role of management, leadership, teaching-learning method, and other facilities. The study findings would be helpful for public universities of Bangladesh and developing countries to reform their education policy and governance strategies.

Keywords: HEQEP, Quality, Higher Education, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Education is the backbone of a nation and no nation can prosper without educated and skilled manpower. It is one of the basic needs for human development and to escape from poverty (Sivakumar & Sarvalingam, 2010:20). So, quality of education is a must for achieving expected growth and development and more importantly sustain it. Quality education can serve the community by contributing knowledge and advanced skills as well as basic competencies and research. Therefore, the significance of quality education for the overall sustainable development of a country is enormous as education is one of the basic and key pillars of development. The importance of quality in higher education is crucial as these institutions produce graduates who not only contribute to the progress of the country but also drive the country by producing future leaders (Panday, 2019). However, the quality of higher education has deteriorated in recent years.

Academicians, education thinkers, education researchers, education policy planners, and other stakeholders are in common consensus that the quality of higher education in Bangladesh has been deteriorating steadily, in some areas quite alarmingly, over the last decades (Salahuddin, 2011; Rashid and Rahman, 2017: 73).

Despite progressive enrollment and adequate expansion of faculties in public universities, the improvement of higher education is mostly quantitative rather than qualitative (Monem & Baniamin, 2010). At all levels of education, teachers, researchers, and thinkers of education emphasized cognitive learning rather than facilitating incumbents to use reasoning, understand, communicate, apply knowledge, and solve real-life or workplace problems (Khaled, 2014). As a result, the number of universities, both public and private, is proliferating day by day, but the quality concern of higher education remains an illusion. Eventually, the top-ranked universities of the

country failed to place themselves in the Times World University ranking list (Rashid and Raman, 2017:73).

To boost up the quality of higher education systems and institutions worldwide have undergone extensive reform and change over the past 35 years with the agenda of improving quality (Chalmers, 2008). A significant feature of this initiative is the drive to produce systematic evidence of effectiveness and efficiency in higher education (Guthrie & Neumann, 2007; Hayford, 2003).

In Bangladesh, the Educational Ministry(EM) and the University Grants Commission(UGC) have been constantly addressing this problem by conducting periodical seminars, workshops, and conferences involving policymakers, administrators, vice-chancellors, principals, and the teachers, to take initiatives for enhancing the quality of higher education (Ali et.al., 2017; Rashid and Rahman, 2017; Islam, 2018). To overcome this situation, the government has taken initiatives by HEQEP sub-projects funded by the World Bank through the University Grants Commission (UGC) in ensuring the quality of higher education in Bangladesh.

In addition, the government of Bangladesh has approved ‘The Bangladesh Accreditation Council Act, 2017’ to ensure the standards of quality in higher education both at the public and private universities (Ali et al., 2017). The goal and vision of the government of Bangladesh are to ensure quality education at higher institutions by 2021 through enhancing quality in teaching, learning, and research and community engagement (Ali et al., 2017).

This study aims to examine the effect of HEQEP subprojects in the qualitative changes in Rajshahi

University both in resources/inputs (infrastructure, technology, teaching methods, professional skill, and capacity), and outcomes (curriculum, results, research, research publications) to enhance the quality of higher education.

AREA OF STUDY AND SELECTION OF SAMPLES

According to UGC, there are 46 public universities, 105 private universities, and 3 international universities in Bangladesh. Therefore, the total numbers of universities are 154 in Bangladesh (UGC webpage).¹ Out of these numbers, only 28 public universities in Bangladesh have been implemented HEQEP subprojects (UGC, 2015). Rajshahi University is the 2nd largest that has selected purposively as my study area. I have selected this university purposively as I am working as a teacher here and everything is known to me. There are 50 departments in this university. 05 departments out of 50 have been selected by using the purposive sampling method to keep the study in a manageable extent. These 5 departments have been selected purposively because these departments have already implemented HEQEP subproject since the period of 2010 to 2018. Besides, most of the respondents of these departments are familiar to me. The selected departments are:

- Public Administration;
- Sociology;
- Management Studies;
- Information Science and Library Management;
- Material Science and Engineering.

¹Retrieved from <http://www.ugc-universities.gov.bd/public-universities>, accessed on 31 March 2020.

SELECTION OF RESPONDENTS

Table-1 Shows the list of respondents who have been included in this study

Table1. Selected Respondents of the Study

Name of Departments	Categories of Respondents				Total Respondents
	Teachers (randomly)	Students (Masters Level only) (randomly)	HEQEP Staff (purposively)	HEQEP key persons/ SPM/DSP/Members/ Chair of the Department (purposively)	
Public Administration	15	45	2	3	65
Management Studies	10	20	X	2	32
Information Science and Library Managements	12	40	X	3	55
Material Science & Engineering	10	20	X	3	33
Sociology	10	40	X	2	52
Authority/Vice Chancellor	X	X	X	1(Ex-VC)*	01
Grand Total	57	165	2	14	238

*I have collected data from Ex-VC as my selected departments have completed their project during his tenure.)

A total of 237 respondents have been selected from 5 departments. Respondents have selected randomly from teachers (57) and students (165) as the total numbers of teachers and students were huge. On the other hand, respondents were selected purposively from staff (2) and key persons (14) of HEQEP subprojects as the total numbers of projects' staff and key persons were limited. Respondents have selected from these four categories (teachers, students, HEQEP key persons, and staff) as they are the main stakeholders and beneficiaries of HEQEP sub-projects.

Data Presentation and Analysis

There are a number of methods, and techniques in the presentation of data for qualitative research in social science. In this study, collected data have been presented by using tables only. Similarly, numerous scholars mentioned various methods and tools for qualitative data analysis. However, three basic methods have been found common for qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2012:564-588) for instance: Thematic Analysis, Content Analysis, and Narrative Analysis. In this study, narrative analysis has been used because this method is used to analyze content from various sources, such as interviews of respondents, observations from the field, or surveys (Bryman, 2012:564-588). Therefore, this method is appropriate for this study.

CONCEPTUAL EXPLANATION

The major key concepts and variables have been defined and analyzed in this section.

HEQEP

HEQEP refers to the abbreviation of higher education quality enhancement projects. This is introduced in 2009 by the University Grant Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh funded by the World Bank (UGC, 2014). The HEQEP central office is located at Dhaka and is leading by a Project Director Equivalent to an Additional Secretary. Besides, 37 more officers and employees are working under this project by deputed from the administration cadre and education cadre (Islam, 2018:27). The HEQEP secretariat calls for proposals from all public and private universities in the country. The eligible entities are (i) Departments, (ii) Faculties, (iii) Institutes, (iv) Centers, (v) Universities, and (vi) a combination of two or more of the above entities.

The HEQEP project consists of four components:

- Promotion of academic innovation in teaching, learning, and research through an Academic

Innovation Fund (AIF) allocating funds to universities on a competitive basis;

- Institutional capacity building at the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the universities;
- Connectivity capacity building for universities and research centers through the development of the Bangladesh Research and Education Network (BdREN); and
- Project Management Unit.

In this study, I have focused on the first component (AIF) which has basic four windows (UGC, 2013): (i) Window 1- Improvement of teaching and learning, (ii) Window 2-Enhancement of research capabilities, and (iii) Window 3-University-wide innovations which will include additional eligible activities for the establishment of Technology Transfer Office (TTO), and (iv) Window 4-Innovation Fund.

In this study, I have selected only 5 departments of the University of Rajshahi- 2 departments from Window-I (improvement of teaching and learning) and 2 departments from Window-2 (enhancement of research capabilities) and 1 department is common from both windows out of four Windows for this study. The selected 05 departments are-1. Public Administration (Window- II); 2. Sociology (Window-I and II); 3. Information Science and Library Management (Window- I); 4. Management Studies (Window-1); 5 Material Science and Engineering (Window-II). I have selected these five departments purposively as they have already implemented their subprojects by December 2017 and convenience to me for collecting data in terms of most of the respondents of these departments are familiar to me.

University of Rajshahi

The **University of Rajshahi** is a public university and the second-largest university in Bangladesh. It was established on 6th of July 1953, The University is ranked 1st in the Bangladesh University Ranking 2019 recognized by Scimago Institution Ranking.² The university has 58 departments and 10 faculties, 6 institutes, and 62 affiliated colleges and institutes. The university was established by the Rajshahi University act 1953 (East Bengal Act XV of 1953), which was passed by the East Pakistan provincial assembly on March 31, 1953.

²Retrieved from <https://www.scimagoir.com/rankings.php?sector=Higher%20educ.&country=BGD&ranking=Research&year=2013>

The University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh is the apex statutory body in Bangladesh to supervise, maintain, promote, and coordinate university education (Rabbani and Chowdhury, 2014:83). Most of the departments of this university has implemented HEQEP subprojects. This study is focused on the impact assessment of the HEQEP in ensuring the quality of higher education of selected 05 departments out of 58 at the University of Rajshahi.

Quality of Higher Education

Simply **quality** refers to the fitness of purpose or conformance of requirements of a product or service. Quality is a perceptual, conditional, and understands differently by different people. According to the American Society for Quality, two meanings of quality³: i) The characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs; and ii) A product or service free of defects.

Deming, W. Edwards (1986) defines quality as “satisfying the customer, not merely to meet his expectations, but to exceed them”. The notion of quality is used in business and industry to measure the needs and expectations of customers from a product or service.

On the other hand, **higher education** means tertiary/university level education like Bachelor, Masters, MPhil, and PhD program. The mission of Higher education is to create new knowledge by research, transfer of knowledge by teaching, and the dissemination and application of knowledge by their relationship with society (Susana *et al*, 2018). The concept ‘**quality of higher education**’ is different meanings compare to the quality of products and services in business or industry. Longanecker and Blanco (2003) defined it as by who and how students are taught rather than by what students learn. Their definition highlights both aspects of academic staff and administrators (Akareem and Hossain, 2016:54).

Quality of higher education is a dependent variable which is dependent on some factors like- vision, mission, goals, and objectives of higher education; quality of the teaching staff, curriculum, admission and assessment standards, the teaching and learning environment, the recruitment process of teachers, the availability of reading materials, library and lab facilities, the effectiveness of management, governance and leadership, etc. (Materu, 2007; Akareem and Hossain, 2016:54-55).

³retrieved from :<https://asq.org/quality-resources/quality-glossary/q>, , accessed on 23rd of March 2020.

In this study, **higher education** means tertiary education/ university level education (Bachelor, Masters, Mphil/PhD.) and more specifically, education of Rajshahi University. And **the quality of higher education** refers to the quality of **inputs** (skilled teaching staff, reading materials, logistics, and technological equipment, classroom, lab, computers, libraries, internet facilities for students to ensure qualitative changes in results and overall academic environment), **process and activities** (formal policies, curriculum, and guidelines, teaching-learning methods, assessments tools, training, workshop, seminars, research works), **outputs and outcomes** (changes in overall results of students, changes in knowledge, attitude, professional skills of teaching staff, quality of publications and research works, skilled manpower) and **impact** to meet the needs and expectations of associated stakeholders (**state, students, society, job markets and global standard of higher education**).

Measurement of Quality of Higher Education by HEQEP

In this study, the HEQEP subprojects of selected departments have been assessed by the following three indicators which are essential for ensuring quality of higher education.

- Infrastructure development for institutional capacity building;
- Professional skill development for ensuring quality teaching staff; &
- Academic curriculum and results of students for meeting needs of the stakeholders.

These three indicators are explained below.

Infrastructure Development

Development of infrastructure means here renovation or/and introduce new research labs, research centers, classrooms, projectors, office rooms, conference rooms, teachers room, and overall academic environment.

Professional Skill Development

Professional skill development means improvement of teaching capacity with new techniques and styles, presentation capacity, job sincerity, research works, quality publications, motivational works for students, attendance of national and international conferences and seminars, etc.

Curriculum Development and the Academic Result

This means improved and updated contemporary curriculum which meets the need and expectations

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of global requirements and impact on the overall results (CGPA/GPA) of the students.

How far the HEQEP sub-projects of selected departments of Rajshahi University is effective for ensuring the above mentioned three indicators to ensure the quality of higher education has been examined under this study.

DATA PRESENTATION

Data has been collected by using a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews of key persons of HEQEP subprojects like SPMs (Sub Project Managers), DSPMs (Deputy Sub Project Managers), Members, Chairman of the Departments, and one Ex-Vice Chancellor. Several questions have been used to collect data, and then selected data based on priorities towards the objectives of the study. Data have been presented by using a single table (table-2) below.

Table 2 present the data collected from the respondents only from 10 key questions focused on the main objectives of this research work

whereas the total number of questions were 25. These 10 questions were related to various initiatives for the development of infrastructure, skill development, technological changes, curriculum development, training programs, research works, the result of students, the role of university authority, and limitations of HEQEP, etc. Data reveals that the rate (55% to 100%) of opinions of respondents is more positive in 6 questions but the opinions rate (51% to 58%) in 4 questions is negative means not improved. That means the effect of HEQEP in higher education is a positive and greater impact in preparing ground/base level of enhancing the quality of higher education. However, the effect of HEQEP in three areas like skill development, curriculum development, and the academic result is more negative than positive. Therefore, the main key indicators of ensuring the quality of higher education are not adequately achieved by HEQEP, and still need more funds and constantly work to reach a satisfactory level (See more details in the data analysis section).

Table2. Presentation of data collected from the respondents in a single table

Questions	Types of Respondents								% of Grand Total Respondents (237)	
	Teachers		Students		HEQEP Staff		Project Key Persons			
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you think this type of project is essential for each entity (dept./institute) of this university?	50	7	147	18	02	X	13	X	212(89%)	25(11%)
Do you find any logistic/infrastructural changes in your department under this project to enhance the institutional capacity?	57	X	165	X	02	X	13	X	237(100%)	0(0%)
Do you find your working environment better than before implementing this project?	57	X	102	63	02	X	13	X	174(73%)	63 (27%)
Do you observe any research works in your department like seminars/conferences/pedagogical training etc.	57	X	108	57	02	X	13	X	180(76%)	57(24%)
Do you find any change in professional skill development, knowledge, attitude, quality of publications and research works, by implementing this project?	26	31	79	86	X	02	7	6	112(47%)	125 (53%)
Do you find any development /change in your existing course curricula/syllabus?	25	32	85	80	2	X	5	8	117(49%)	120 (51%)
Have you found any change in exam results?	25	32	71	94	X	2	3	10	99(42%)	58(24%)
Has any role of University Central Authority in implementing the HEQEP subproject?	57	X	165	X	2	X	13	X	237(100%)	0%
Do you find any limitations in project implementations?	50	07	125	40	2	X	10	03	187(79%)	50(21%)
Do you think HEQEP is effective for enhancing the overall quality of higher education?	36	21	70	95	1	1	7	6	114(48%)	123(52%)

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, data has been analysed by using the narrative analysis method of qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2012:588). In this study, the main query was to evaluate the effect of HEQEP subprojects on higher education. This section also has focused on the major findings and results of this study to assess the effect of HEQEP and the extents of research objectives are fulfilled. To measure the effect of HEQEP in ensuring the quality of higher education, empirical data has been analyzed critically by testing three basic objectives and indicators of this study.

According to table 2, the first question was do you think this type of project is essential for each entity (dept./institute) of this university?

In response to this question, 212(89%) out of 237(100%) respondents of all categories think this type of project is essential for developing infrastructures and logistic supports, creating lab facilities, changing the academic environment, arranging pedagogical training for teaching staff development, producing job oriented manpower, and enhancing the overall quality of higher education. However, 25(11%) out of 237 respondents think this type of project is not helpful for qualitative changes in higher education. They think that this money is only helpful for the personal gain of some selected persons not for students or the overall academic environment. Here, we can see that most of the respondents- teachers, students, project staff, and committee members think, for changing and developing any areas of higher education, there is no alternative of fund or fund related project as money is the fuel of development.

The second question was do you find any logistic/infrastructural changes in your department under this project to enhance the institutional capacity?

In response to this question, all the respondents of this study (selected from the 5 departments) 237 (100%) out of 237 gave their opinion positive about the changes and development of logistics and infrastructures of their departments. After receiving a positive response from them, a supplementary question was about what types of infrastructures have developed in your department. In response to this supplementary question, most of the opinions were about computer lab, research center, renovation of teacher's room, office rooms, classrooms, digital open library (DOL), projectors, and air conditioners (AC). Respondents gave their opinions that some departments have changed

adequately but some departments have not. Therefore, the institutional capacity has been improved by infrastructure development but not sufficiently and still needs more improvement. Similarly, in response to another question **about the working environment of table 2**, 174(73%) out of 237(100%) respondents gave their opinions that they have found the working environment better than the previous time (before implementing this project). However, 63(27%) respondents say there is no change in the working environment. These 63(27%) respondents were from students. Some departments' classrooms are not renovated by the air conditioner (AC) and not well furnished but they have introduced and installed projectors. The students of those departments think this is not enough for changing the working environment. Like this, in response to the question about **research works** of table 2, 180(76%) out of 237 respondents recognized that some training programs like seminars, research workshops, pedagogical training, and conferences have been held under this project but 57(24%) respondents gave their opinions as no or unknown regarding this. Unknown respondents are from students. However, the opinions of teachers outside the committee of subprojects have varied from department to department. According to the opinions of respondents, these programs were very helpful for knowing about research works, preparing a seminar and conference paper, teaching methods, presentation style, and curriculum development. All these programs will develop the writing, presentation, and analytical skills of the teachers and students. Two conferences (one national and one International) held under Public Administration which has introduced the department as well as the university in the notational and international academic arena. The outcome of these programs is two issues of Journals and one proposed book. Similarly, the research training and workshops of sociology and other departments have a positive impact on research and teaching methods. Selected Masters Students who have participated in all these programs also have benefited according to their opinions.

In another question of **professional skill development**, teachers, students, and other respondents gave both positive and negative opinions. In this important issue, 112(47%) respondents including teachers and students think professional skills of teachers are developing which are reflecting by their attitude, knowledge, teaching style, way of presentation, guiding students, publications, motivational

works for students, engagement of research works, attendance of national and international seminars and conferences. In contrast, 125(53%) respondents give their opinion that they did not find any qualitative changes in the professional skills of teaching staff and their daily works like-teaching, publication, guiding students, and engagement of any research work. Similarly, in response to the question of **curricula/syllabus development**, respondents gave their opinions only two departments have made some changes (opinions of 117/49% respondents) and updated but not completed according to the outcome-based curriculum. On the other hand, three departments (opinions of 120/51% respondents) are still under changing process as per the requirements of institutional quality assurance cell (IQAC). Therefore, the teaching is going on by following the previous syllabus, not the updated curriculum.

In response to the question of **changes in exam results**, mix reactions and responses were found from all types of respondents including teachers and students. Majority of respondents (58%) thinks there is no change in academic result, the ratio of the result is like previous. In contrast, 42% of respondents think the result has some changes in the overall grade ratio. For example, previously more than 50% of students' secured B grades but now more than 50% secured B+ grades, so, it is an impact of the HEQEP project. Some respondents (out of 42% of respondents) are given opinions that this is too early to assess the impact of HEQEP because the impact of anything takes a long time. Like this, in response to this question of the role of **central authority**, all the respondents of this study (selected from the 5 departments) 237 (100%) gave their opinion positively. After receiving positive responses from them, we had a supplementary question about why and how? In response to this supplementary question, we found information that the watchdog functions and monitoring of central authority would be an effective check and balance mechanism for ensuring the duties and responsibilities of the university teachers, employees, as well as reduce misuse or abuse of funds and responsibilities of fund dealing entities.

I have gathered some information from the top authority of the university (ex-Vice Chancellor) regarding this. While discussing at the time of the interview, I came to know that he has taken some noble initiatives to ensure the accountability and transparency of the subprojects. Before his

initiatives, the projects were dealing independently by the project team or team leader and there was no involvement or control of project entities like departments, faculties, or institutes. As a result, some project teams or team leaders did everything without informing anyone of his/her dept./institute or other project dealing entity. Therefore, most of the money for those projects was misused without reflecting and development of the project entities. During his tenure of vice-chancellorship, he received some written complaints from some project dealing department/entities and took policy initiatives by syndicate so that no project can do anything without the approval of the head of the project entity for example chairman of the Department.

Thus, the top authority has a vital role in implanting project transparently. Besides, top authority can ensure the accountability of teachers and employees to ensure the quality of higher education by taking necessary policy initiatives and implement those policies properly, for instance, recruitment and promotion policy based on quality and merit, quality of publications, research works, and outputs, and like this.

In response to this question of do you find any limitations in project implementations, 187(79%) respondents found some limitations but 50(21%) respondents found no limitations in the implementation of HEQEP subprojects at the University of Rajshahi. According to the 79% respondents and while taking face to face interview with SPM, DSM of HEQEP sub-projects and ex-vice chancellor of the university found some limitations like interpersonal conflict, disagreement in decision making and procurement among key members of sub-projects, non-cooperation, and dissatisfaction among faculty members, corruption, barriers in fund disbursement, the conflict between the chairman of department and HEQEP team. These are the major impediments in the way of efficient and effective implementation of HEQEP subprojects.

The last question was **do you think HEQEP is effective for enhancing the overall quality of higher education?** In response to this question, 48% respondents think this is effective for quality of higher education whereas 52% respondent thinks only the HEQEP is not effective for ensuring overall quality of higher education. Besides, many other factors are essential for quality of higher education like, quality of teaching staff, recruitment process, facilities of resources for in-depth research and publications and many more like these.

Result

- The main finding of the study is some explicit positive changes found in infrastructure development.
- Some initiatives have been taken by using the HEQEP fund to conduct research workshops, seminars for professional and curriculum development but no qualitative changes have been found in professional skill development, curriculum, and academic results of the students. Therefore the quality of higher education is still far away from the targeted goal.
- Conflicts and disagreements found among project members and chairman of the department in implementing HEQEP subprojects.
- Effective watchdog functions of top management like VC/Registrar of University is essential for ensuring accountability and transparency in managing projects and others routine works of the employee including teaching staff.
- Apart from these, several factors are responsible for ensuring the quality of higher education such as recruitment of qualified teachers following by merit principles, market-based course curricula, the availability of reading materials, library and lab facilities, the effectiveness of management, governance and leadership, political will, sound political environment, the government supports, and cooperation of all faculty members, students and staff of universities.
- It also observed that the impact of a program or project takes a longer time, so we have to wait some years to see the impact of the HEQEP subproject for the qualitative changes in higher education.

Discussion

This section has focused on the discussion of major findings and results of this study to assess the effect of HEQEP and the extents of research objectives are fulfilled. To measure the effect of HEQEP in ensuring the quality of higher education, empirical data has been analyzed critically by testing three basic objectives and indicators of this study.

Effect of HEQEP on Infrastructure Development and Enhancing Institutional Capacity

To ensure the quality of education first need suitable and well equipped with adequate infrastructure and sound academic environment for attracting, admitting, and teaching students.

However, without adequate finance well-equipped infrastructure, a comfortable academic environment, and building institutional capacity are not possible. In this study, fund of HEQEP subprojects have been used to buy various inputs like raw materials for the renovation of classrooms, teachers room, office room, enriching seminar library, technological equipment for lab development, internet facilities, projectors, research centers have been developed and introduced in selected departments of this study. In this study, it has been found that selected 5 departments have renovated, re-engineered, and developed some of their classrooms, introduced projectors, internet facilities, research centers, enhanced lab facilities with modern technologies, and enriched seminar libraries with the latest books, journals, and other reading materials. That means the project is helpful for institutional capacity building.

In a similar study of BIDS (2018:11), interviewed 364 faculty members, 2116 students, and 60 heads/SPMs of 90 departments of 22 Universities in Bangladesh and found that the largest number of facilities came from the contribution through HEQEP subprojects. For example, within five years, the sample departments obtained 64 computer centers, renovation of classrooms, and lab facilities with the financial contribution of HEQEP subprojects (BIDS, 2018). BIDS also found that classrooms have been equipped with projectors and air-conditions, teaching and learning environment has changed in a positive direction.

This is a good sign of improving the infrastructure, enhancing institutional capacity and quality of education by HEQEP but not enough.

Professional Skill Development

The second objective of this study was professional skill development which is very important for developing the quality of teaching staff and ensuring the quality of higher education. The quality and skill of staff (all categories- academic, technical, and administrative are adequate in number and have the skills) are essential to meet the requirements of academic standards and strategies of teaching and learning. So, teachers should use innovative teaching techniques to make the students curious, focused, engaged, and interested to learn the subjects taught and can maintain a scholarly approach for engaging students in creative and innovative academic activities. For developing professional skill HEQEP subprojects funds have used to conduct some research workshops, seminars, pedagogical training for developing curriculum and teaching-learning methods,

assessment criteria of answer scripts, techniques of improving writing skill for writing and preparing research reports, journal articles, books, and overall skill development of teaching staff.

In this study, except limited teachers no qualitative changes found in the professional skills development of teaching staff and their daily works like-teaching, publication, guiding students, and engagement of any research work.

Similar results found in the research works of Hassan (2017) that the present higher education system is following the memorization approach rather than critical thinking by students. According to him, all universities are teaching not research universities. At this stage, one of the means to achieve 'quality education' is through 'quality teaching' by using continuous upgrading in pedagogy, use of technologies, assessment methods aligned with student-centered learning, creating of innovative learning platforms, and also assessing impacts and documenting the effectiveness of the teaching delivered.

Therefore, the second objective is not fulfilled adequately. Thus, one of the important prerequisites of the quality of higher education is not adequately materialized in the selected departments. This is another crucial finding of this study.

Curriculum Development and Impact on Academic Result

Curriculum development and the academic result means improved and updated contemporary curriculum which meets the need and expectations of global requirements and impact on the overall results (CGPA/GPA) of the students. The curriculum is the main guideline, which contains vision, mission, goals, and objectives including the lessons and academic content taught in a specific course or program. Therefore, an updated and latest curriculum is indispensable for ensuring the quality of higher education. In this study, it has been found that a few departments have made some changes and updated but not completed according to the outcome-based curriculum. In addition, some departments are still under the changing process as per the requirements of institutional quality assurance cell (IQAC). Therefore, the teaching is going on by following the previous syllabus, not the updated curriculum.

Similarly, no qualitative and quantitative change found in academic results; the ratio of the result is like previous.

Therefore, the third objective and variable of this study are also not fulfilled as per the opinions of the majority of respondents. Thus, another criterion of quality of higher education is not adequately found in selected departments of Rajshahi University.

Apart from these three indicators and objectives, numerous factors are responsible for ensuring the quality of higher education such as vision, mission, goals, and objectives of higher education; quality of the teaching staff, curriculum, admission and assessment standards, the teaching and learning environment, the recruitment process of teachers, the availability of reading materials, library and lab facilities, the effectiveness of management, governance and leadership, etc. In a study, Panday (2009) mentioned that the recruitment of teachers at Rajshahi University is based on political loyalty or family relationship or any other group identity instead of merit. In his own words, "one candidate having four first classes did not get selection even though five candidates having three first classes managed to get selection".

In another study, Rabbani and Solaiman (2014) found that the policy options of higher education, as well as students' perception on specific quality issues of higher education in Bangladesh, is suffering from the governance-related problem due to lack of implementation of rules, regulations and institutional arrangement. They also found that recruitment and promotion related decisions are settled on a personal connection, party politics, and inter-personal link not based on qualification.

Similarly in a survey study, Mazumder (2014) found that most of the higher education institutions failed to meet the needs and expectations of the student. Only five universities demonstrated their commitment to making initiatives towards improvement of quality by placing a high value on their students' points of view.

During the study period, we found that there is no vision, mission, goals, values, learning objectives, learning outcomes of the University and Departments. However, it is a matter of hope that recently, some initiatives have been taken by the university to set these specified elements of quality education by institutional quality assurance cell (IQAC).

In this study, it has also been found a very crucial finding that the role of top management/university authority is very vital for ensuring development, accountability, and transparency in every aspect of quality education. Apart from these, some

limitations like interpersonal conflict, disagreement in decision making and procurement among key members of sub-projects, non-cooperation of faculty members, corruption, barriers in fund disbursement, and conflict between the chairman of department and HEQEP team have been found, which, are the major impediments in the way of implementation of HEQEP subprojects.

In conclusion of this study, it can be mentioned that the effect of HEQEP subprojects has a positive impact on enhancing the overall quality of higher education in Rajshahi University but not enough. Therefore, HEQEP subproject is helpful but need supports of other actor and factors like top management, political will, government watchdog functions through UGC, etc.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the above analysis, the quality of higher education is a crucial issue for global competition and development but it has been deteriorating in developing countries like Bangladesh. From the empirical study of this study, it has been found that selected departments have made some planned changes in infrastructure. Besides, those departments have conducted some research workshops, seminars, conferences, pedagogical training for curriculum development, writing research reports, journal articles, and developing skills of academic staff and graduate students. However, these are not adequate and sufficient for overall quality of higher education.

Therefore, needs more investments, efforts, and continuous improvement. In the case of professional skill development, the respondents gave their opinions that few changes were found in attitude, behavior, teaching-learning methods, and quality publications in a few academic staff but there is no qualitative change in overall academic performance in general. Similarly, in overall academic environment and curriculum development, no significant improvement has been found but few departments have been involved in changing processes and have some progress. Therefore, the selected three indicators or objectives of this research are achieved moderately not satisfactorily. Thus, the impact of HEQEP is positive but not sufficient.

Apart from these, some limitations found in managing HEQEP subprojects and the watchdog function of top management of the University is essential. Besides, recruitment of qualified teachers is a vital instrument for ensuring the quality of higher education but in practice, party politics and inter-personal relations got preference than merit.

Therefore, to ensure the quality of higher education, the central authority of the university (UGC) and top management (VC/Registrar) have to deal with a proactive role so that every faculty member and employee may under accountability. Without accountability and transparency, no project fund will utilize properly. As a result, the quality of higher education will not ensure. In the recruitment of teachers, political loyalty should be reduced and merit principles should be prioritised. It is worth mentionable that The University of Rajshahi is now working for enhancing the quality of higher education through its institution of quality assurance cell (IQAC).

Availability of Data and Material

Opinion survey data have been used to prepare this manuscript. There is no conflict of interest and human trial data

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