THE GOVERNANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION OF BANGLADESH THROUGH THE LENS OF NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Based on the governance equalizer tool of New Public Management (NPM) this paper examines the Higher Education of Bangladesh as a common regulating scale of governance. The time frame is divided into three periods: past, present and future covering ten years timeline. Essentially review of literature and legislative documents are utilized to analysis the overall situation of governance of higher education of Bangladesh. The analysis reveals that dominant state regulation and high academic self-governance accompanied by considerably low managerial self-governance, stakeholder guidance and competition has been the traits of the past decades. The initiation of National accreditation council in 2010 is one of the few governance reforms of present time. Along with this the state regulation remains same as it was before but there is a decrease of managerial self-governance. The competition level among private universities increase recently and a unique form of academic self-governance "political collegiality" has been developed among the academic communities who directly or indirectly involves with political group which can be mentioned as a negative development of governance in the higher education sector of Bangladesh. On the other hand initiative of National accreditation council is a positive development of the HE sector which can help to create a healthy competitive environment among the universities in near future.

Keywords: Higher Education, Governance, New public management, University, Bangladesh.

1 INTRODUCTION

"Good governance is not a sufficient condition for achieving high quality, but it is certainly a necessary one. Governance sets the parameters for management. A mismanaged enterprise cannot flourish, and institutions of higher education are no exception." (World Bank, 2000, p.59).

The above statement depicts the significance of good governance for the appropriate management of higher education institutions (HEIs). In the decades of 1980s the world had experienced reforms in university management and mode of governance. The wave of New Public Management (NPM) flowed over the United States and Europe and simultaneously the discourse of governance came along with NPM. Before taking initiatives for the enhancement of good governance and higher education management it is important to conceptualize the structure and mechanism of governance. With regards to this, this paper analyzes the governance of Higher Education system of Bangladesh. For this purpose the concept of governance

equalizer (De Boer, Enders, & Schimank, 2007) was utilized to explore what is happening in the higher education system of this small country of South Asia.

1.1 Higher Education in Bangladesh

During the emergence of Bangladesh as an Independent nation it inherited six public universities which give us the idea that this country has a practice of public higher education institutions since the beginning. It started with the establishment of University of Dhaka in 1921 by the British government following the Oxbridge model (Kabir, 2011; Alam, 2007). On the other hand the thought of privatization of this sector was first initiated in 1980. Bangladesh was one of the few developing countries to consider the option of privatization (non-state) higher education at that time (Alam, Haque & Siddique, 2006). After the initiation of private education act 1992 the first university has also been established in the same year. Therefore before 90s higher education is used to offer by a large number of public universities and colleges. A newly established nation and also the afterward effects of war directs the then government to focus on infrastructure development and therefore education was never the first priority. For this reason we can found after war and the consequent decade of 1980 was a stagnant period in the course of higher education development. Hardly any reform was taken place except some planning in the commission reports of 1974 and 1979 (Hossain, 2014). Instable political situation due to clashes between students and government cause closing of the HEIs several times and created long lasting session jam, late completion of degree by the students, increase of cost per student.

1.2 Higher Education Management & Governance Structure

The management of higher education system in Bangladesh is totally centralized and under the authority and responsibility of Ministry of Education (Alam, 2007). All public and private universities are autonomous organization controlled jointly by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and University Grand Commission (UGC). It has been fixed by law that the prime minister or the President is the chancellor of university (UGC, 2012). The selection process of Vice chancellor (VC) is different for public and private universities. In public universities the VC is selected from the faculty members and previous studied mentioned that the decision of selection is very much influenced by the ruling political group (WB, 2002; Alam, 2007). On the other hand according to the private university act 1992, the VC of a private university comes from an entrepreneur body or someone selected by that group. The act also identified key positions for administrative functions which are exactly similar to public one just with an additional position that of Director of Finance and Accounts. However many private universities do not follow the administrative structure prescribed by the act and instead they follow a new Organogram (Alam, 2009). According to the new act for the regulation of international universities all these were brought under UGC authority. Ministry of the Education (MOE) is the highest authority or decision maker and according to the law UGC plays the role of developing plan for universities and after the approval of MOE implement those plans. UGC is responsible for funding of public universities. Though Private universities do not get any government assistance in terms of funding, they need to receive approval from the UGC to operate and award degrees. Tertiary colleges are under the authority of National University. However, the responsibility is limited to setting up curriculum and organizing and administering exams (ADB, 2012).

The autonomy of the universities of this country was explored by several reports. According to OECD (2003) autonomy is usually determined by the level of capability and the right of an institution to decide its own course of action pertaining to institutional policy, planning, financial and staff management, compensation, students, and academic freedom, without the interference of outside authorities. OECD (2003) concluded that the term is a relative concept, existing to different degrees in different contexts. However, the common ground for assessing the level of autonomy of universities usually consists of such elements as academic freedom, budget or funding implications, staff management, and quality supervision. In case of Bangladesh the academic freedom is restricted, funding is controlled, and staff management is absent (Kabir, 2011). In most of the faculty and universities no specific rule for quality supervision neither internally nor externally. Therefore Alam (2007) mentioned this as so-called autonomy. Political interference of local administrative body was also identified. For instance if a local parliamentarian wishes chairperson of a governing body (GB), he or she may be legally do so, otherwise the local district commissioner (government official) is the chairperson of the GB (Alam, 2007). As a result political atmosphere always prevails in and affects the HE sector of this country (Alam, 2003).

1.3 The Challenges of Governance of Higher Education

Before elaborating the topic of governance equalizer the broader perspective of governance needs to be explored. In general governance refers to all processes of governing whether undertaken by an authoritative body (government), market or network, whether over a family, tribe, formal or informal organization or

territory and whether through laws, norms, power or language. According to Bevir (2013) the word 'governance' is used in a variety of contexts, but at a general level, it refers to all forms of social coordination and patterns of rule and the term governance mainly denotes a formal power given to the policy makers, legislators and key people to control a particular sector (Alam, 2007). In formal context the process includes all the actors along with government involved in influencing the decision-making process (such as lobbies, parties, media), is centered on the relevant "governing body". Following the participatory approach in present days, the definition of governance is not only confined in the possession of authority but also identified as a way for the interaction and coordination of an enterprise/sector that helps to correlate both minor and major units, as well as the personnel of an enterprise, in order to function effectively (Kabir, 2011). Therefore in the context of higher education the "governance" indicates the formal and informal arrangements that universities undertake to make decisions and take actions (Kabir, 2011).

Different reports has been published indicating the problems in governance of higher education in developing countries (WB,2000, Alam, 2007) which highlights that nepotism, cronyism, political activism and corruption are some of the vital problems that hinder good governance in HE in this countries. These problems then upshot poor academic freedom, non-meritocratic selection, financial instability, non-accountability and corrupt governing councils (e.g. Senate, Syndicate and academic councils). By analyzing student's perception of their assessment system in universities Personal and political connection influence the student's assessment practices in Bangladesh and academics are recruited for their political prejudices (Rabbani & Chowdhury, 2014).

The decision of this sector is highly linked with the existing ruling political party and it change with the change of government (Rabbani & Chowdhury, 2014). From the very beginning till present the politics of Bangladesh has a great influence in higher education sector particularly (Ahmmed, 2013). On the other hand the public universities also had great impact in the politics of Bangladesh for instance the direct participation of students and teachers in politics (Hossen & Anwar, 2011). There is a high level of government intervention and interference in university affairs and this is constantly expanding (WB 2002; WB 2013). UGC has been established to play the role of autonomous body (University grant commission act, 1973) in the HE sector and keep this sector free from any type of biasness and manipulation. However the increasing government intrusion in different internal activities of university deviate UGC to perform that role and now it is difficult to separate country's HE from politics. In 2010 a national Strategic plan for HE has been taken for the next 20 years and major problems and challenges has been highlighted. One of the major reforms suggested by the plan is depoliticization of public universities (ADB 2012; OECD, 2003) which has been suggested by several other study also (Naser, 2010; Chauhan, 2008).

2 METHODOLOGY

The prevalence of the traits New Public Management in the higher education sector was measured by utilizing the governance equalizer model as the analytical tool in this paper. According to Woldegiyorgis (2014) the utilization of governance equalizer will enable us to compare higher education stem on the basis of more objective indictors. It analyses the governance system of higher education particularly utilizing the five mechanisms in relation to governance: state regulation, stakeholder guidance, academic self-governance, managerial self-governance and competition (De Boer, Enders, & Schimank, 2007). How these components affect in shaping the university activities, to what extent they have influence in the overall governance, control or decision making process will help us to determine the overall governance status. Therefore the objective of this paper is to analyze the role of each of these components in the context of governance and regulation of universities of Bangladesh. It offers answers to the questions like what is the structure of organizational hierarchies in the universities of Bangladesh, whether there is any reflection of market demands in the initiative of universities of this country, how the academicians take part in different internal and external decision making process, whether any competition prevails for resources or students between and among the higher education institutes?

This paper is based on two major source of data: analysis of existing document and literature and interview. Essentially review of different literatures documents were employed as methodology while preparing this paper. Interview with two teachers of public and private universities had also been done as a form of supplementing and validating the secondary source of data. The comparison among the students of One of major methodological limitations while preparing this paper was lack of data and documents on higher education system of Bangladesh. The Ministry of education of Bangladesh does not have strong database with properly organized data yet. Moreover, inconsistency exists in the available statistics. Secondly, the field of higher education in Bangladesh remains massively under-researched till date. Therefore, the expected outcome of this paper is a comparative description of governance of higher education of Bangladesh in the light of new public management concept. Along with this the main trend of development of this sector will

also be identified and finally based on this discussion an analysis of strength and weakness of the overall higher education governance will be added from a critical point of view of the author.

2.1 New public Management and The Governance Equalizer

The idea of New Public Management (NPM) primarily flourished out of the criticisms of highly centralized and bureaucratic approaches of government initiatives. Hood (1991) described those approaches as wastefulness, ineffectiveness and poor managerial performance. On the other hand, the organized structure of private sector and market driven mechanisms of the emergence of neoliberalism laid the foundation of the concept of new public management. The United States was one of the pioneer countries who adopted NPM in higher education sector underlying the fact of rising higher education costs and declining funds from government. Additionally the higher education institutions faced the pressure to perform in terms quality, effectiveness and efficiency (Cohen & Kiser, 2010). However, such phenomenon is yet to happen in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, in this paper effort has been made to analyse the prospective of NPM reform policies and practices in the context of higher education governance system of Bangladesh.

In order to identify the governance perspective alongside NPM, De Boer, Enders, and Schimank designed a tool to compare the existing trends across higher education systems. Taking the sense of the equalizer they defined governance equalizer as 'The configuration of governance which is made up of a specific mixture of the five dimensions at a particular point of time, in the equalizer model each of the five governance dimensions can be turned up or down independently from each other' (2007, p.3-4). These dimensions of higher education governance are:

- *State regulation:* This dimension indicates the conventional top down authority of the state which provides policy directions to HEIs through government intervention such as legislation, funding mechanisms, and judicial precedent (Maes, 2015).

- *External Stakeholder Guidance:* It refers to another outside force that influence higher education system like state. These stakeholders can be representatives from industry, civil society or local governance.

- *Academic Self Governance:* It explains the process of collegial decision making by the group of internal authorities within university settings. It relies on more horizontal approach while making decision through peer review based self-steering of academic communities.

- *Managerial self-*governance: This refers to the top management body of the university which mainly works to maintain the educational institutions as an organization from the managerial perspective. For instance, the University Grant Commission in Bangladesh performs this role as the top of the administrative body.

- *Competition:* In the period of growing resource constraints, the idea of competition depicts the concepts of race among the universities for scarce resources, money, personnel and prestige.

De Boer, Enders, and Schimank (2007) proposed the following governance level for each of the five dimensions under NPM (Figure 1) which suggests a combination of lower level of state regulation and academic self-governance as opposed to higher level of external stakeholder guidance, managerial self-governance and competition for a properly function governance system within higher education institutions.
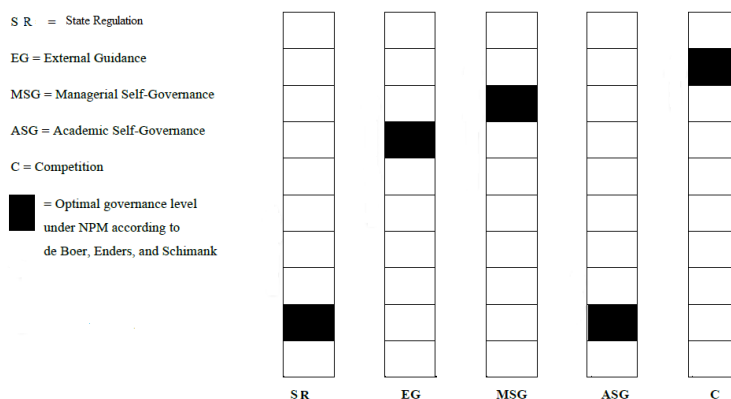

Figure 1. Optimal Governance level under NPM model by De Boer, Enders, and Schimank (2007)

3 GOVERNANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION: PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

The decades of 2000 (2001-2013) has been considered to explain the past mode of governance of Bangladesh. Events before this decade will come several times in the discussion as they are linked to present events. Each component will be discussed based on the time period one after another. The timeline of ten years (2003-2013) before and ten years after (2014-2024) from present time are utilized here as past and future. It is better be mentioned that the past reforms in HE sector is so scattered and it is hard to confined to the ten years frame for the analysis of past status of HE system. This discussion will be followed by an analysis of future trends of the system, assessment of strength and weakness of HE governance and finally some concluding remarks.

3.1 State Regulation: The Paradox of Autonomy

In Bangladesh the government holds the main decision making role of higher education sector. The ministry of education determines and directs the activities, structure and roles of universities by law and acts. The government follows several strategies to oversee the university activities continuously. From the policy making to implementation stage there is active regulation of government in the sector (Figure 2). According to the university act of 1973 in all public universities of Bangladesh there will be members from the government personals in UGC organizational structure for instance there are three nominees of the Government (Secretary, Ministry of Education, a Member of Planning Commission, Secretary, and Ministry of Finance as the part time member of the commission (UGC, 2012; Rahman, 2011). The vice chancellor will be appointed by the government (UGC, 2012) and very often teachers supporting ruling political party will be selected as VC (Heyward, 2008). Similarly, there is difference in terms of funding and allocation of money of private universities of Bangladesh. This shows the overall control of government on private universities whereas the public universities are not obliged to a fixed amount of budget like privets one (Quader, 2011). During past the public universities of Bangladesh acted according to the act on which they have been established and the act provides the respective universities enormous power about opening new subjects, creating post of faculties and management, preparing syllabus and curricula (Rahman, 2011). In case of private universities the role of UGC starts from evaluation of the proposal of establishing to opening new faculty and then again that particular university needs to have permission from the government after assessment of UGC. This shows us how the government of BD is regulating the activities of university with the operation of UGC.
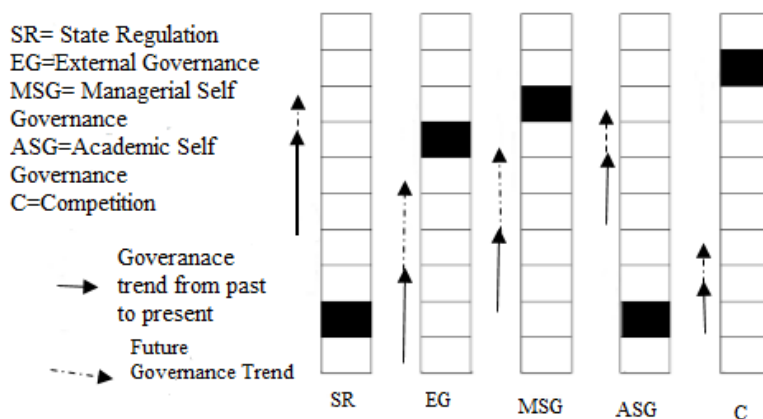

Figure 2: The governance level of higher education of Bangladesh from NPM context

Secondly, financing is another important aspect of higher education system and in Bangladesh higher education institutions are not given financial autonomy. By analyzing the budgeting process, we can see that both the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance of the BD government are the authorized body. They follow a top-down approach as they involve the UGC and universities after the planning. In one report on educational budgeting UNESCO (2009) has argued that budget is an essential instrument through which the political choices of government are translated into practical outputs. This is exactly what is happening in case of this country since the very beginning of this field (Alam, 2009). It is also suggested that Bangladesh employs the incremental budget approach where block grant budget allocation with a little increase from the previous year has been practiced from past till now (Monem & Baniamin, 2010). All public universities depends on the government fund and for this reason they are not financially autonomous (Samarrai, 2007; BIS, 2011). This dependency ultimately has impact on the overall governance of public universities as

Ziegele (2008) explain in the concept of financial autonomy. It depicts the idea that budgeting system has negative impact on the institutional capacity and accountability schemes. Eventually, the dependency on the government adversely affects the extent to which institutions can accumulate financial reserves, keep surplus on state funding, and borrow money on the financial market.

The above examples show the higher level of government involvement in higher education sector in Bangladesh and this situation provide less scope for the academicians to come up with new ideas instead they are encouraged to maintain the rules and regulation accordingly. There was a higher level of involvement of the government in higher education sector and still it exists.

The essence of above discussion portrait that although University Grant Commission of Bangladesh was established as an autonomous statuary body many external bodies influence the decision making process and interfere in the autonomy. On the basis of past and present tracks of state regulation it can be said that the chance of decreasing involvement of state regulation is very low. Still there is strong connection between politics and HE. However recent days there are emergence of new stakeholders in this sector for instance National Accreditation Council, donor parties (e.g. World Bank and Asian development Bank) which can inspire changes in terms of providing more autonomy to particular universities so that they can work more creatively (HEQEP, 2010). There has always been strong state regulation on the governance of public universities in Bangladesh and present political trend shows increasing influence of state in future. These should be decreased in order to let universities play the autonomous role more effectively (Figure 2).

3.2 Guidance by external stakeholders: Prospective of collaboration

To determine the involvement of external stakeholders (EG) of HE in the decision making process of this sector we analyze the activities of funding groups and also checked the relevance of university activities in terms of market demands. Low involvement has been explored as the inner and external stakeholders have hardly any direct role to play in decision making process of the higher education system of Bangladesh. The members of these commissions are mainly from government and academic staffs (Hossain, 2014). There was no participation of the members from business world and for this reason there was no reflection of responding to market demands. In terms of funding most of the funding of public universities comes from government. Little or no linkage between the market and HEIs creates the less involvement of external stakeholders in the HE sector of Bangladesh. In the decade of 2000 there was a massification of private universities in this country which is caused by the market demand of education (Alam, 2007). Now there are almost 83 private HEIs and the number of student is increasing. This illustrates an opposite scenario of public universities. The level of linkage between private universities and enterprises or job provider organizations is more than that of public one. In most of the cases there are members from entrepreneurs in the board of trustee or academic council of private universities as they invest their capital for those universities (khan, Mridha, & Barua, 2009; Islam, 2008; ADB, 2012). However questions can be raised like whether the involvement is accelerating the coordination of university and enterprise or they enter into the sector as a means for profit making only. On the other hand during last three or four years there is noticeable presence of external stakeholders in the premises of public universities. Though they are not directly involved in decision making activities of the universities but different activities like job fair, seminars to attract fresh graduates are arranged by different business group. So in terms of the involvement of stakeholder in universities activities the public universities are still more resistance to give access to them than the private universities. The involvement of different international bodies like World Bank and Asian development Bank with government of Bangladesh to improve this sector (WB, 2010) introduced another aspect of external stakeholder governance and this cooperation indicates that there are potentials to enhance guidance from external stakeholders for the improvement of this sector. Both public and private universities have lack of stakeholder guidance. Therefore these two parties should come together to create the platform of collaboration according to their common interest.

3.3 Academic self-governance: A Culture of Political collegiality

Academic self-governance (ASG) is suggested as the role of professional communities within the university system (De Boer, Enders, and Schimank, 2007). It indicates the tendency of collegial decision making within universities and the peer review-based self-steering of academic communities. In Bangladesh practice of teacher evaluation is not prevailed in most of the public universities except in some institutes of public universities and in few private universities. Therefore peer review based self-steering among colleagues is not a common picture in the academic communities; not in the past and also not now. However the teacher student relationship in tertiary level of education mostly follows a top-down approach among the teachers in terms of dealing with the students. No system of accountability works (Islam, 2008) in this situation mostly in public universities and also in private. The professors act more deliberately than the junior teachers in terms

of doing their own (Aminuzzaman, 2008). In most of the cases student have no saying and they are obliged to respect their teacher. However it is a matter of hope that recently few cases has been found where newly recruited young lecturers start considering student's opinion while deciding common issues (Monem & Baniamin, 2010; Khan, 2006). So there is change but not a rapid one.

Along with this there is a strong tendency among some teachers of not considering the management of administrative staffs. The prevalence of hierarchy can be a reason behind this but there are no such researches that support this. No monitoring of teacher's work actually exists in public universities and this encourages the teachers to undertake their responsibilities in such a manner that suits their convenience which is another example of academic self-governance. In 2010, UGC had come up with the plan of National Accreditation Council (NAC) for the private universities in the twenty years strategic planning for higher education sector (Rahman, 2012). This initiative may help to change this present practice of carelessness by the academic lords. Along with this it is more important to introduce accreditation mechanism for private higher education institutions also (OECD, 2003).

Another type of collegiality can be identified in the context of Bangladesh and it should be named as "political collegiality". In public universities faculty members introduced themselves as supporter of political group. During the period of last ten years only two political groups are prominent in the politics field of Bangladesh and this influences the university also and one can find the formation of at least two groups of teacher supporting those two political parties (Rabbani & Chowdhury, 2014).. In such a context often it happens that teachers supporting the ruling parties get more advantages than others and this situation can be referred as a form of academic self-governance. In future the situation going to remain the same or deteriorate more if the political influence be as same as now. No other solution but separating politics from the higher education sector can be an effective approach to overcome this challenge (Fig 2).

3.4 Managerial Self-Governance: A Dormant Trait

The public universities of Bangladesh are completely dependent on government funding and thus there are challenges that create difficulties to execute full-fledged autonomy. Moreover the Organogram of the university authority is not conducive to build an environment of managerial self-governance. All the faculties of Public universities, within and among public universities, they have to follow the instructions of the vice chancellor who is predominantly selected by the ruling political parties (Ehsan, 2009; Monem & Banimin, 2010). So there was always a low level of managerial self-governance in this country and till now the situation does not change. All these phenomenon suppress university administration to play leading role in university management. Actually it is difficult for the universities to create a sense of ownership within the university where the state regulation is so high (Woldegiyorgis, 2014). The recruitment of managerial staffs depends on the government's decision and it is difficult for the non-academic staffs to play a leadership role where their counterparts (academic staffs) hold a hierarchy environment within the universities (Ehsan, 2009). Therefore managerial characteristics of university administration always hold a dormant role whereas the other group remains dominant in past and also in present. It cannot be said that in near future the managerial self-governance (MSG) situation of the universities will improve. Because it will need the autonomous regulation of the HEIs or it can be said that with the prevalence of the high state regulation in the HE sector of Bangladesh the status of managerial self-governance will not change much in near future.

3.5 Competition: Almost absent in past and presently increasing

Another important component of governance equalizer is competition which was almost absent in the field of HE. However during the decades of 2000 a massification of private university occurred and now there is a growing number of students who are joining private university (Alam, 2009) but it cannot be said that this increase create an environment of competition between public and private universities. There is One of the major problems of HE sector of BD is the absence of quality assurance or accreditation council for the continuous monitoring of the HEIs (Hayward, 2008; Chauhan, 2008). Moreover the allocation of lump sum budget for the public universities is another reason of provoking no competition among those HEIs. After the massification of private HEI and also because of the recent private university act 2010; there is a growing and noticeable competition among private universities. Along with this recent initiative of National Accreditation Council (NAC) for the private HEIs is another reason of stimulating competition. On the basis of past and present analysis of competition status it can be said that in future the overall competition will increase among the universities. It is important to take some initiatives to encourage competition among public universities and for this performance based financing can be a possible solution (Fig 2).

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Being not very optimistic, the writer will rather choose the "Transitional stage" of Walt Whitman Rostow's

stage of growth (1960) to describe the present status of higher education system of Bangladesh. Undoubtedly shortage remains in the elements of infrastructure: lack of teachers, dearth of facilities, dominant state regulation, and lack of managerial self-governance or paucity of research works by the academic community but the basic infrastructure has already been established. The mass privatization of higher education sector can be addressed as a positive development of this sector and this growth laid the foundation of further improvement. Therefore the preparation for take-off stage has already been started in the sector of HE of BD and one of the prerequisites to take tertiary education to next stage of growth is to ensure good governance of the HE system. The dominant state regulation can be balanced by the decentralization of authority and encouragement of managerial self-governance within the universities. Along with this the activism of political parties should be restricted in universities. Effective and strict initiative against all kind of corruption in the education sector can smooth the path of establishing good governance in this sector. Proper implantation of NAC can contribute to ensure the quality of the mushrooming private universities.

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