

Facilitating the Role of Private Universities Through Entrepreneurship Development Program: A Case Study on Southern University Bangladesh

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Received: May 10, 2020

Accepted: June 14, 2020

Online Published: June 22, 2020

doi:10.5539/jel.v9n4p86

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v9n4p86>

Abstract

The main purpose of this research is to establish a link between Entrepreneurship Development Program (EDP) and the role of private universities to show how EDP helps the performance of common roles of a university. Here, qualitative research methodology has been used to investigate the contribution of EDP of Southern University Bangladesh (SUB) in facilitating the conventional roles of a university. The EDP faculty members of SUB are selected as sample and a face to face interview is conducted with them individually to rationalize EDP as an effective intervention to facilitate the roles of SUB as a university. The study discovers six universal roles of a private university where the EDP of SUB facilitates the performance of the roles such as innovation, community development and promoting national heritage etc. The study also identifies the factors which impede the effectiveness of EDP and proposes some guidelines for the successful continuation of the program. As every private university has the propensity to play an effective role in the socio-economic development of a country, this research may contribute a lot to the body of knowledge of higher education management and endorse the significance of EDP in facilitating the role of higher education institutions effectively.

Keywords: university objective, private university, public university, entrepreneurship development program

1. Introduction

Education is the most important precondition of human resource development where educational institutions play a universal role to disseminate it in the society. The role of higher education is to accelerate the socio-economic development activities of a nation by offering higher-order learning (Kohoutek, Pinheiro, Čábelková, & Šmídová, 2017). Hence, national human resource development is the main objective of post-secondary education (Schmidt, 2008). All around the globe, universities are facilitating the development of higher education and knowledge creation. They facilitate the political, social and economic development of a nation through human resource development interventions. The academic curriculum of a university helps the learners to explore their inner potentials and encourages them to think freely to generate new ideas. Through multifarious extracurricular activities, it supports learners to become better citizens and leaders in all spheres. The indirect objective of university education is to ensure social prosperity and good governance. It safeguards the social and political norms of a country and preserves the national cultural heritage. However, to encounter the competitions among the universities of 21st century, it must try to enhance the standard and quality of education synthesized with the challenges of globalization (Rahimnia & Kargozar, 2016; Ashraf, Ibrahim, & Joarder, 2009).

Entrepreneurship development is one of the preconditions of the socio-economic development of every developing nation (Leff, 1979). It facilitates economic prosperity through the mobilization of scarce resources, innovation, and employment generation. The outcome of an effective entrepreneurship development program may ensure political stability and social order in the society. Most of the higher education institutions around the world contribute to ED programs by offering academic courses and extracurricular events to promote entrepreneurial capacity among the learners. Elite academies like Harvard Business School and Babson Global

College, USA, have initiated entrepreneurship development models which have also been found successful in many developing countries of the world. Most of the universities of Bangladesh are also conducting entrepreneurship development programs in a traditional way which are only limited to some courseworks (Shil, Shahriar, Sultana, Rahman, & Zayed, 2020). A few private universities of Bangladesh including North South University, Daffodil University and East Delta University are taking some piecemeal on-campus projects for entrepreneurship development but the outcomes of these programs are typically unrecorded. Hence, these initiatives are narrowly aligned with the academic curriculum only and as a result, missing the association with the broader goals and objectives of a university. This study will try to remove the gap of earlier researches by establishing the facts of EDP as the ways to achieve the broader roles of a private university with special reference to Southern University Entrepreneurship/Sustainopreneurship Development Model (Table 1).

2. Statement of the Problem

In Bangladesh, private universities are growing like mushrooms as about one hundred and seven private universities have been registered within a short span of time. Most of these universities offer traditional curriculums focusing only on learners' employment. Moreover, the academic curriculums are maladaptive and rigid due to the external compliance of University Grants Commission and professional associations (Islam & Salma, 2016). Our academics are not change-friendly though they must have change policy according to environmental necessities (Muzaffar & Khan, 2004). Though very few of these universities are adopting the modern notions of tertiary education, still traditionalism prevails there as the private university culture is highly influenced by that of public university. As a result, fostering change in private universities is getting difficult day by day and the scenario is also getting worse as most of them are converting them into degree awarding mill. Hence, defining the quality of university education in Bangladesh has become very difficult.

According to Akareem and Hossain (2012) students' perception of the quality of private university education depends on their socioeconomic background. They have also found that students' belief regarding the standard of private university education is only mediocre. In another study carried out by Ashraf et al. (2009), discovered that good physical facilities are the key determinant factors of quality education where the students of private universities are somewhat satisfied in this regard apart from cost issues. However, the social and moral issues of education are not evident in their researches. Most of the private universities in Bangladesh are in a rat-race to place their brands in the job market, and as a result, universities are designing their curriculum solely on employability skills development. But the situation is getting uncertain as the job market is shrinking all around the globe leading intense frustration among the university graduates due to rising unemployment rates (Chisty, Uddin, & Ghosh, 2007).

Moreover, employers' testimony about the standard of graduate skills of private university students in Bangladesh is not satisfactory (Mamun, 2011) and as a result, their access to the job market is getting very challenging day by day (Islam & Salma, 2016). The current volatile situation of the job market is driving the private universities of Bangladesh toward a new role of entrepreneurship development. Hence, Southern University Bangladesh (SUB) being a leading private university in the country is trying to stand out from the crowd regarding entrepreneurship development (ED) programs. The Business School of this university has initiated a long-term comprehensive program to foster the entrepreneurial aspirations among the graduating students. The program is market-oriented and flexible in confronting environmental demands. It has also been framed with a view to promoting most of the universal missions of a university. The objective of this study is to appraise the EDP model of SUB in attaining the roles of a private university and explore the challenges in implementing it across all academic disciplines.

3. Literature Review

Higher study institutions like university have multifaceted objectives and are expected to generate knowledge (Etzkowitz, 2002) and industry-aligned research culture to facilitate innovations that directly contribute to the economic development of a country (Gunasekara, 2006). Their principal role is to work for the development of an innovative system that fosters knowledge across the world and academic curriculum. A flexible and thoughtful academic policy will enable a university to make a bridge between industry and government to cultivate a research and development culture in a country (Tödtling, 2006). Universities are the decisive area of industrial innovation and their outcomes are to be transferred to the industries for the economic evolvment of a country (Thursby, Jensen, & Thursby, 2001). However, the culture of innovation in the universities could be heightened by engaging faculty members in university-industry alliances (Azagra-Caro, Archontakis, Gutiérrez-Gracia, & Fernández-de-Lucio, 2006).

University has to play an extensive role in the socio-economic development of a nation and in developing a

better citizenship (Arthur & Bohlin, 2005). It is the highest center of knowledge which can lay the foundation of moral character among the students. In a word, the core objective of a university is to disseminate higher-order learning so that it can overtake the horizon of knowledge for the learners to ensure socio-economic welfare around the world (Walshok, 1995; Islam & Salma, 2016). The key objectives of every university are teaching, research and socioeconomic development in the society (Cortés-Aldana et al., 2009). Although most universities have high economic objectives to aid the Gross Domestic Product of a nation, they should also focus on sociopolitical developmental roles to address the sustainable development goals (Taylor, 1987; Ferrer-Balas, Buckland, & de Mingo, 2009).

Moreover, universities ought to engraft technical skills, interpersonal and social skills among the graduating students to make them equipped for the competitive nature of job market. In the current emergent knowledge-based society, these skills are very important for a graduate to secure a flourishing career in the job tree (Laurillard, 2002). However, the social skill is missing among the university graduates as the economic role is exceedingly dominating the cultural role of a university (Chatterton, 2000). According to the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education of Great Britain (1997), the universities must preach the democratic norms of a country and uphold the sanctity of human civilization among the students. The social development role of a university is to highly emphasize on the national policy directives in compliance with the world. There must be integration among knowledge, cultural engagement and social development in the university curriculum (Delanty, 2001). Universities should play a role to develop a sense of volunteerism among the students to bring about a positive change in the country and build a just society there (Marullo & Edwards, 2000).

Another objective of university is to create a positive force among the graduates to develop efficiency in community-based economic development (McCall, 2003) and engage them in community development initiatives (Winter, Wiseman, & Muirhead, 2006; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Universities of the twenty-first century must walk on the path of sustainable development. It must address the challenges of sustainable development issues and espouse the curriculum by changing the need of the society and its key stakeholders (Ferrer-Balas, Buckland, & de Mingo, 2009). Effective leadership in all national agencies and commercial enterprises is another precondition of holistic development of a country. Therefore, the students of the universities must be groomed via comprehensive leadership development programs to uphold the flag of national development initiatives (Duvall, 2003). Higher educational institutions should create a platform for students to exercise on-campus leadership (Piland & Wolf, 2003). Such intervention will make the students competent to set the course of the national development program of their country.

According to Audretsch (2007) the concept of university was derived from the church-based education system where preaching social virtues was one of the core areas of its curriculum. Universities are the centers of character development and better citizenship. Therefore, they must act as a platform for developing righteousness among the students through morality development programs which could be rendered simultaneously along with the national or economic development goals (Arthur & Bohlin, 2005). Nevertheless, most of the universities in Bangladesh are lagging behind to act as guardians of morality and ethical decay which is fairly visible in the attitude and behavior of the students. Besides, private university students are highly vulnerable to drug addiction (Sani, 2010) and terrorist activities (Haider, 2017). Commerciality in higher education is converting the private universities into a “Degree Mill” (Hopper, 2005) giving no focus on moral education in the academic curriculum. As a result, good governance and regulatory control are very important to uphold the universal role of the private universities of Bangladesh, suggested by Alam (2009).

Entrepreneurship is an important factor that accelerates the continual growth of national economy where the universities could be a development partner of an entrepreneurship friendly ecosystem in a society (Huda, 2016). Such entrepreneurial ecosystem may bring about a positive change in the society and for a nation at large (Shil et al., 2020; Greene, Rice, & Fetters et al., 2010). Though, to develop a pool of meritorious citizens for public and private services is the most visible function of private universities of Bangladesh, the universities must perpetuate their responsibility to create an entrepreneurial society to spin the wheel of the economy (Audretsch, 2014) and maintain the social stability in the country. The educational system of a university must nurture a creative environment for developing initiators of modern enterprises and for this, a pro entrepreneurship academic should be offered in institutional level (Lüthje & Franke, 2002).

Southern University Bangladesh offers a unique EDP namely “Sustainopreneurship Development” to the undergraduate level students of business studies. Students enroll in the mandatory core course “Entrepreneurship Development” and start their journey to the path of entrepreneurship. This intensive program follows nine phase process (Table 1) to flourish the spirit of entrepreneurship among young learners (Huda, 2016). This study endeavors to rationalize whether the EDP model of Southern University meets the common roles of universities

or not.

Table 1. Southern university entrepreneurship/sustainopreneurship development model

Phase	Interventions	Activities and Events
1	Counseling Sessions	Motivational programs are conducted by the Entrepreneurship Development course teachers to inspire the students to be an entrepreneur where success stories of successful entrepreneurs are presented in this regard.
2	Team Formation	Learning team is formed comprising five members in every team.
3	Development of Creative thinking skills	Case studies on successful entrepreneurship are conducted along with brainstorming sessions among the team members to exercise creativity.
4	Internship on Entrepreneurship	Field visit to sub-urban and rural areas are organized to search for new ideas of sustainable business. Attachment programs with successful small entrepreneurs are organized to conduct biographical studies and in the end of which a camera journal on successful entrepreneurship is developed.
5	Hands on Training	Industry experts like bankers or marketing professionals are invited to conduct week long training on Business Plan Writing
6	Business Plan Development	It includes comprehensive analysis on industry and market to develop a marketing, production, financial and most importantly sustainability plan of a small business
7	Laboratory Training	Entrepreneurial/Sustainopreneurial laboratory training is organized in a form of idea and business plan competition to provide a practical experience of entrepreneurship among the students.
8	Appraisal	Performance feedback of all the events is provided by successful entrepreneurs, intrapreneurs, social activists and academicians.
9	Continuous Improvement	It includes record keeping, tracking, and future support activities by the university. Databases of potential sustainopreneures/entrepreneurs are developed at university. MIS, an entrepreneurship network, is also created using social media platform where graduating students are provided with continuous learning & development session

Source: Huda (2016) and upgraded by the authors.

4. Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature. In the beginning, necessary information on the roles and objectives of higher education is compiled from research journals and periodicals available on websites. Pertinent search works on the universal role of the universities were reviewed irrespective of country and area of study. Authors of this study selected “Southern University Bangladesh” as a case which was established in the year 2002. The permanent campus is located at the commercial capital of Bangladesh, Chattogram. Three distinct focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted to collect relevant information needed for the study. The first FGD session was conducted on senior faculty members of nine programs of Southern University Bangladesh to explore the wide-ranging role of a private university in the 21st century. Total twelve faculty members have participated the session. The common opinion of the participants was summarized and recorded on a flipchart. The second FGD session was conducted on the faculty members of the Department of Business Administration where total ten faculty members have participated in the session. This session with faculty members of the Department of Business Administration was mostly focused on the points of relationship between Southern University EDP and its impact on the role of a private university.

However, third FGD session was arranged with the subject teachers of ‘Entrepreneurship Development’ course where the faculty members acted as assessors of entrepreneurship development fair and business plan competition (Table 1, Phase 7 & 8) and a total seven faculty members have participated the session. To bridge the concept of EDP with the role of the private university, the results of the previous two FGDs were shared with the faculty members of EDP. During the session, they were asked to link the outcome of EDP with the role of private universities. Their justifications, disagreement, and challenges of EDP were recorded to explore the connections between EDP and the role of a private university. All FGD sessions usually lasted for one hour, and the key points of the discussions were recorded by the co-authors of the article on white paper and using cell phone recorder. These sessions were scheduled during August 2019 to September 2019. Finally, to validate the findings of the three FGDs conducted on different categories of faculty members, the key informants including Head of the Department of Business Administration, Director of the Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) and the Director of EDP program were interviewed comprehensively and their comments were recorded in a digital voice recorder. Hence, the individual FDG sessions along with the information of the key informants helped the researchers to go through the detail of the SUB model of entrepreneurship development and to theoretically align the findings of FGD sessions.

5. Results and Discussion

The study explores six general roles of the private universities of Bangladesh. According to the participants of FGD, these roles should be stitched onto the fabric of the academic culture embedding on the curriculum of a university. The primary role of a private university is to contribute to the economic development of a country through knowledge creation. It must promote an R&D based innovation culture in this regard. A private university must facilitate the social development by ennobling a sound citizenship behavior among the students. It should engage the students and alumni in community development programs and social services. They must take initiatives to preserve and promote the national heritage of Bangladesh. Nonetheless, a university is to create a pool of future entrepreneurs by nursing the students with the spirit of entrepreneurship. These roles must be conditioned along with the mission and strategic interventions of the university. The statements voiced in the FGD are also manifested in the existing literature of the authors like Cai and Liu (2014); Islam and Salma (2016); Delanty (2001); Arthur and Bohlin (2005) and Audretsch (2014).

The results of the interview conducted on faculty members of EDP portray the relationship between the outcomes of EDP and the role of a private university. According to the opinion of the course teachers, the role of the university is facilitated by the EDP of Southern University Bangladesh (Table 1). The program directly facilitates the university to carry out the role of entrepreneurship development. The sustainopreneurship curriculum of SUB grooms the students with the approach of sustainable development. Students are inspired to formulate a business plan on the concepts of community engagement by arranging fairs on Sustainable Development Goal and Entrepreneurship Development. Such initiatives help the students to learn the norms of social responsibility and citizenship behavior. Students are encouraged to develop business ideas that facilitate community welfare and to come up with the solutions of social problems. EDP nurtures the intelligence of social innovation and business innovation side by side. Participants of EDP are also inspired to develop new products that promote the indigenous culture of Bangladesh. This exercise triggers the mind of the learners to be perceptive in preserving the national heritage of Bangladesh. Learners are trained to work as a team to develop the sense of association and fellow feelings.

The faculty members also shared their concern on the success and prospect of EDP of SUB. They said that the drive towards maintaining the nine phased Sustainopreneurship Education Model is declining gradually. According to them, the model is very lengthy and it is too hard to complete all the phases within a four months semester. In this system, the preoccupation of the teachers in academic and administrative tasks impedes the smooth conduct of the program and it is too exhausting for them as well. However, there is no financial incentive for the faculty members for conducting EDP as there is no budget for this program. As a result, it is also very difficult for the course teacher to motivate the insolvent students to join EDP. Most of them are unwilling to take part in the program as they cannot afford the cost of organizing different events of EDP. For the reasons above, the expiration of some major phases of EDP is visible nowadays. The key informants were found very positive about the success of EDP and liked to support the program with their fullest enthusiasm. Hence, they have shown their concern as the budget for this program is still undecided.

6. Conclusion & Policy Prescription

The study tried to reveal the critical roles of a 21st century private university and answered how an Entrepreneurship Development Program may facilitate to play its roles effectively. Every university must prepare essential directives to promote the spirit of entrepreneurship among the graduating students and for this, an entrepreneurship friendly curriculum is required for all programs irrespective of science, arts, and commerce. However, EDP should be incorporated along with the other missions of the university to support its multifaceted roles and objectives. To assure the success of EDP an effective policy should be framed by the management of SUB and a well-thought budget has to be allocated for fruitful continuation of this program. The teachers and staff involved in EDP must be rewarded honorably to propel their drive towards the success of EDP. Participation of the students may be enthused by allocating more credits to the entrepreneurship development courses considering EDP as an internship project. However, it will not be rational to extrapolate the result of this qualitative research conducted on only one stakeholder of EDP. An empirical investigation on the students is also essential to establish the theme of the title of this study. Finally, the study proposed some guidelines to achieve the fruit of the model in facilitating the roles of a university.

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