

Private Higher Education in Bangladesh: Issues of Quantity, Quality and Ways Forward

Keynote paper

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1. Introduction

- What does one expect from the development of private higher education, more specifically campus-based private universities in the country? In the specific context of Bangladesh (a low-income, growing/ industrializing Asian country), one can enumerate the following objectives of private higher education institutions (HEIs):
 - To accommodate burgeoning young population in the tertiary level education sub-sector; there are about 25 percent of the total population (of 160 million) in Bangladesh who belong to the age-group 10 to 40 years.

Introduction (cont...)

- To equip the enrolled students (at undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate levels) with quality education.
- The education, knowledge, skills imparted by HEIs have to be relevant to the economy/society.

Introduction (cont...)

- One can utilize the conceptual framework proposed by Benjamin F. Bloom et.al (1956) in defining 'quality education'. Three domains of cognitive (head), affective (heart/ emotional) and psychomotor (head/ hammer) are involved in attaining optimal mix of education/ knowledge. Naturally, at the higher/ tertiary level more emphasis will be given on cognitive domain of knowledge. Students will be required to master how to apply the concepts they have learned in the classroom in solving their problems in the real world in business/ industry, family, the larger world.

Introduction (cont...)

- **As a student goes up the scaffold of knowledge-hierarchy, the ultimate goal should be to reach a situation where he/ she becomes deeply analytical and innovative in problem-solving. Any university or HEI, following the above definition of 'quality education' has to aspire to become a 'center of excellence' within a defined or definite (say 10-15 years') time horizon**

2 (a). Performance of Private HEIs- Quantity

- It should be known that historically (at least since 1972) the private higher education (first degree and above) sub-sector has been mainly owned and organized by the non-government colleges/ institutions. They were brought under the administrative jurisdiction of National University (an affiliating university) in the 1990s. The latest Bangladesh UGC report (2010) says that in the year (2010) 19.11 lakhs (1.911 million) students enrolled with the higher education institutions (HEIs) of the country of which, only 9.36 percent enrolled with the campus-based public universities (such as Dhaka University, Rajshahi university, BUET [Bangladesh university of Engineering and Technology], SUST [Shah Jalal University of Science and Technology]). See table 2.1

Performance of Private HEIs- Quantity (cont...)

- **Overwhelming number of students i.e; 66.5 percent of the total HEI enrollment lie with privately (non-governmental) owned colleges/ institutions. About 11.54 percent (i.e; 2.207 lakh or 0.207 million) of the total tertiary enrollment is by the campus-based private universities; and every year its absolute enrollment is growing by leaps and bounds. See table-2.1**

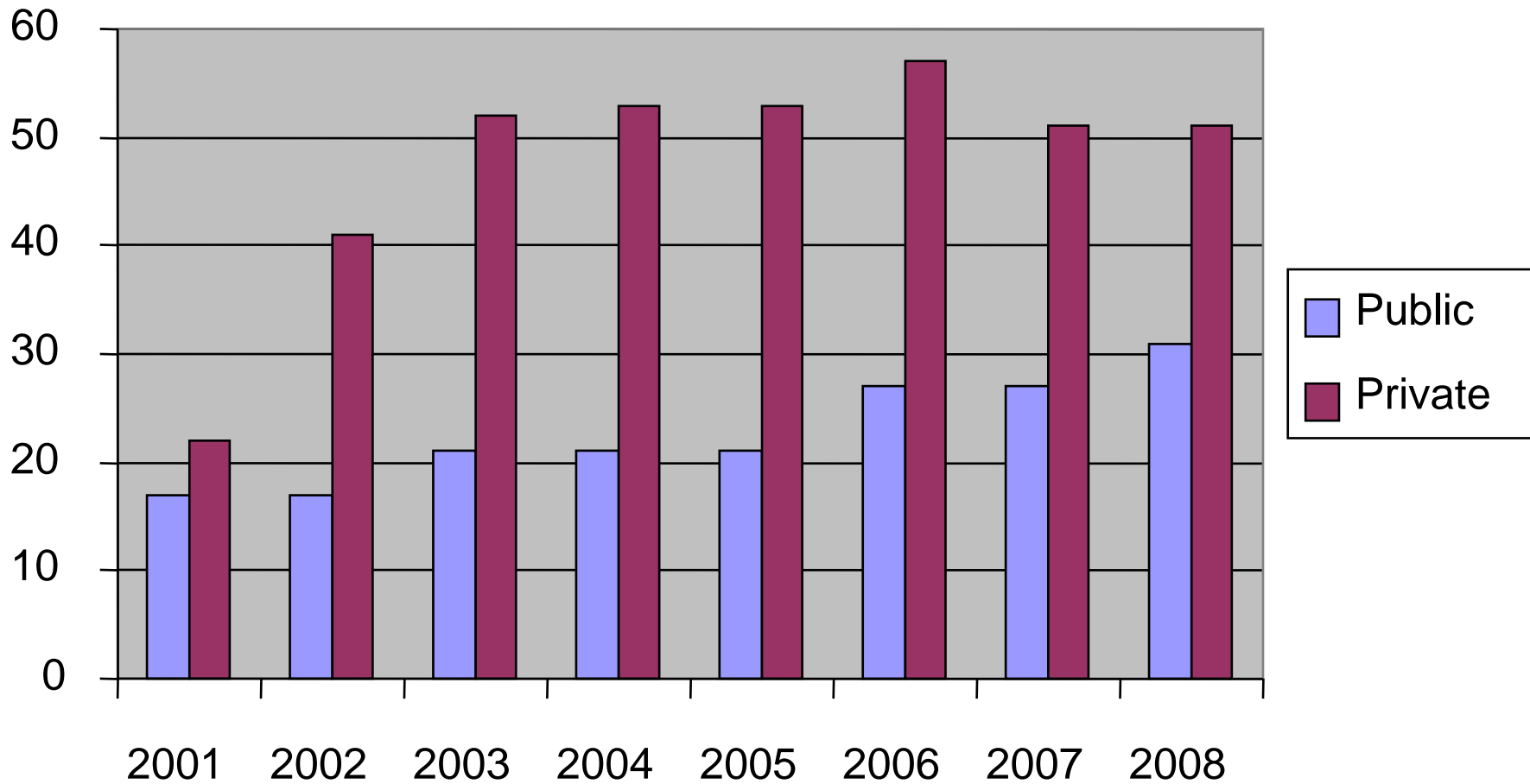
Performance of Private HEIs- Quantity (cont...)

- It has been observed from the latest macro-data (2010) that only 10 percent of the total tertiary level enrollment is shared by the publicly-owned campus-based universities. Every year about four lakhs HSC (higher Secondary Certificate) graduates are churned out by the mainstream and the Madrassa system; only 40 percent of them can be accommodated in the existing public and private HEIs.

Table-2.1 Bangladesh Higher Education: Enrollment in Public and Private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), 2010

SL.N O	HEI-type	Number	Enrollment (Lakhs)	
			Total (Percent Female)	% of the total
(i)	Campus-based Public Universities (PUs)	29	1.79128 (30)	9.4
(ii)	Bangladesh Open University (BOU) (distance learning)	01	1.22503 (40)	6.4
(iii)	National university (NU)	01 (colleges=2350)	12.70843 (43)	66.5
(iv)	Islamic University (IU)	01 (madrassa=1282)	1.17905 (31)	6.2
(v)	Campus-based Private University (PrUs)	51	2.20752	11.5
Total			19.11	100.00

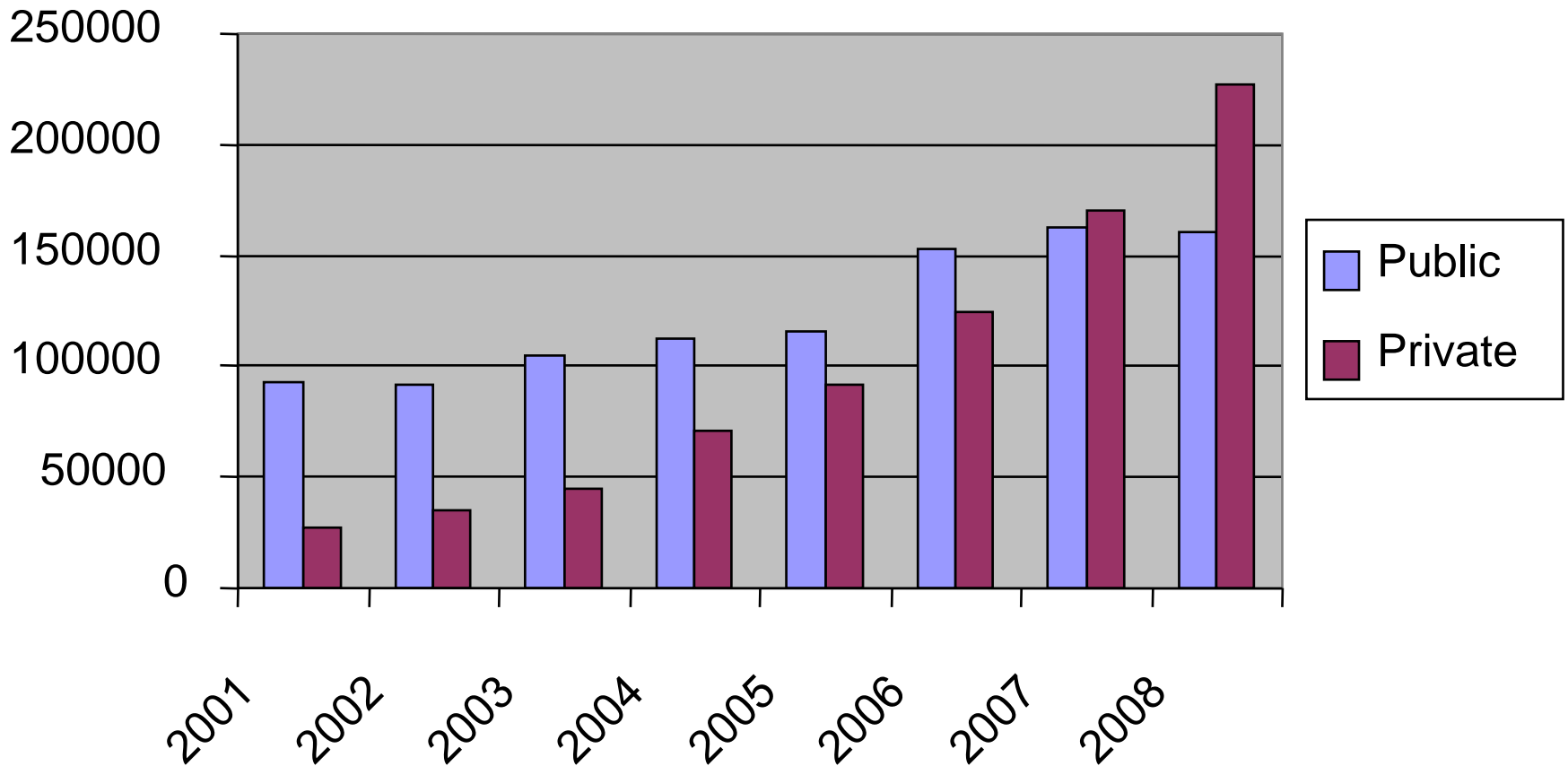
Graph-2.1
Bangladesh: Number of Universities - Public and Private, 2001-2008



Graph-2.2

Bangladesh: Enrolment by Public and Private

Universities,2001-08



2 (b). Performance of Private HEIs- Quality

- **Looking at the government (input-process-output system) of private HEIs (especially the PrUs) of Bangladesh-seems like the PrUs are more enterprising and result-oriented-quick success (results) ensures their survival/sustainability (no dole from the State/ any other donors, foreign or national)**

Performance of Private HEIs- Quality (cont...)

- Recent empirical studies (see Abu Naser, 2011) estimate perception of students, teachers and parents in faculty (teaching) and infrastructural resources of six sample PrUs (NSU, UODA, Premier, PUB, Green, ASA) of the country-(a) Much needed to be done in selection of optimal quality faculty-members (full-time junior members, part-time senior members the norm); no well-defined requirement policy in most cases (b) physical facilities (temporary campus even after 10-15 years) not adequate, not in the right place/ location.

Performance of Private HEIs- Quality (cont...)

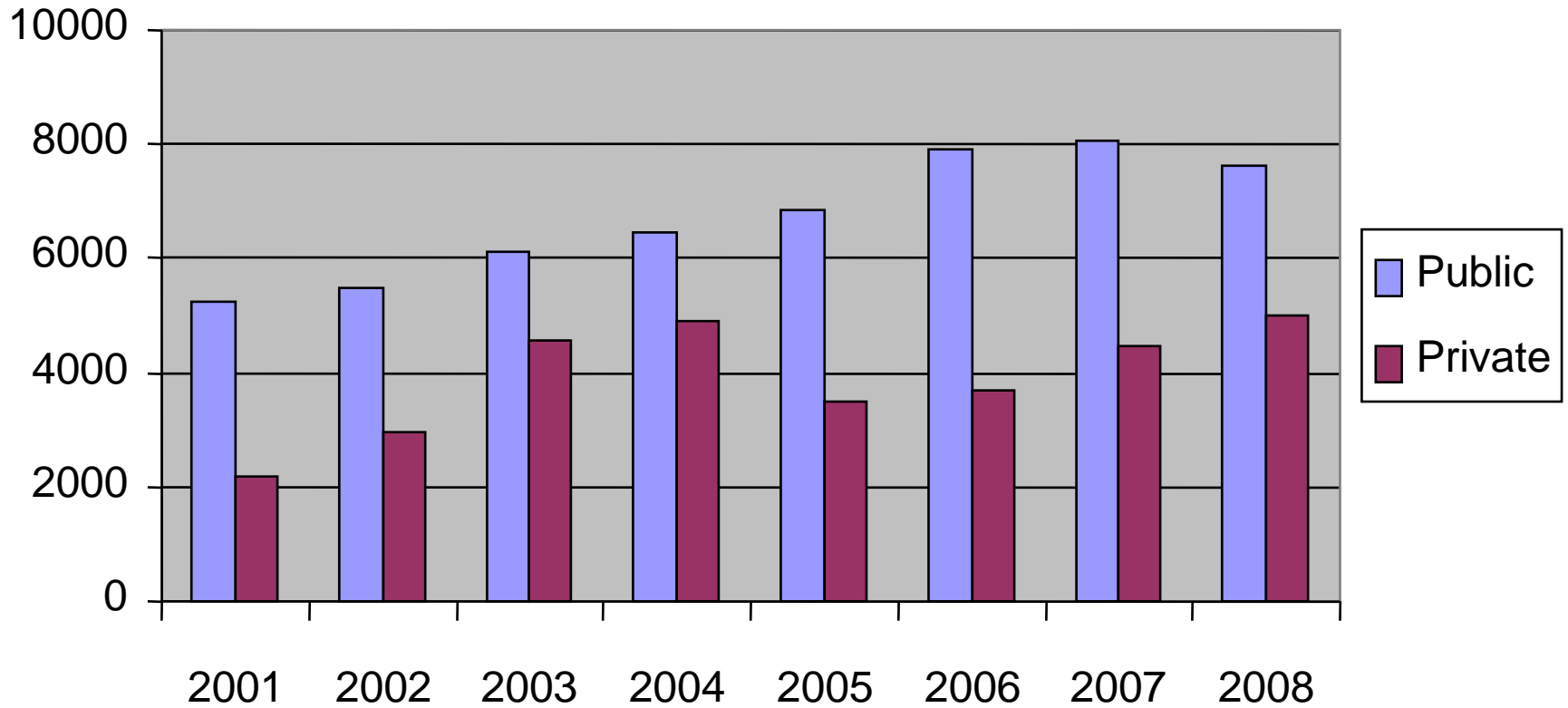
- Classroom facilities and educational materials in most cases good/ satisfactory; lab-facilities not adequate.
- Limited (or non-existing) facilities for extra co-curricular activities; not much physical facilities from club activities.
- PrUs in most cases do not get good inputs (as intakes)- generally, best HSC-graduates try to enroll with BUET, public medical colleges, IBA (Dhaka University and so on; but given relatively more efficient governance PrUs produce better outputs in terms of marketable and relevant outputs)

Performance of Private HEIs- Quality (cont...)

- **Recent evidence (Rahman, 2013) from two PrUs (namely NSU and BRAC) shows that Career Development Service (CDS) wings of the universities prepare the graduates by different initiatives (e.g; mock interview, corporate presentation by leading companies, career festival etc.) to get linked with the world of work; in these universities roughly 80 percent got employed**

Graph-2.3

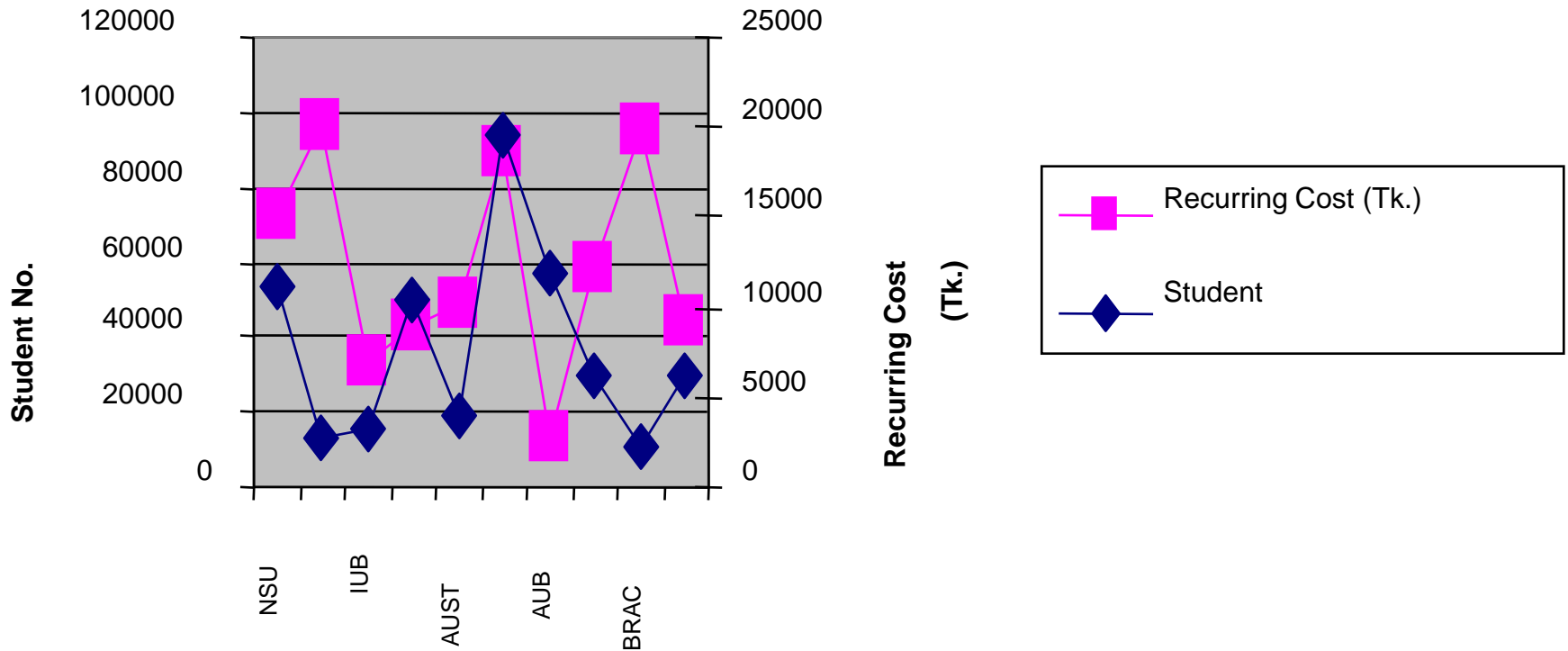
Bangladesh: No. of Teachers in Public and Private Universities, 2001-08



Graph-2.4

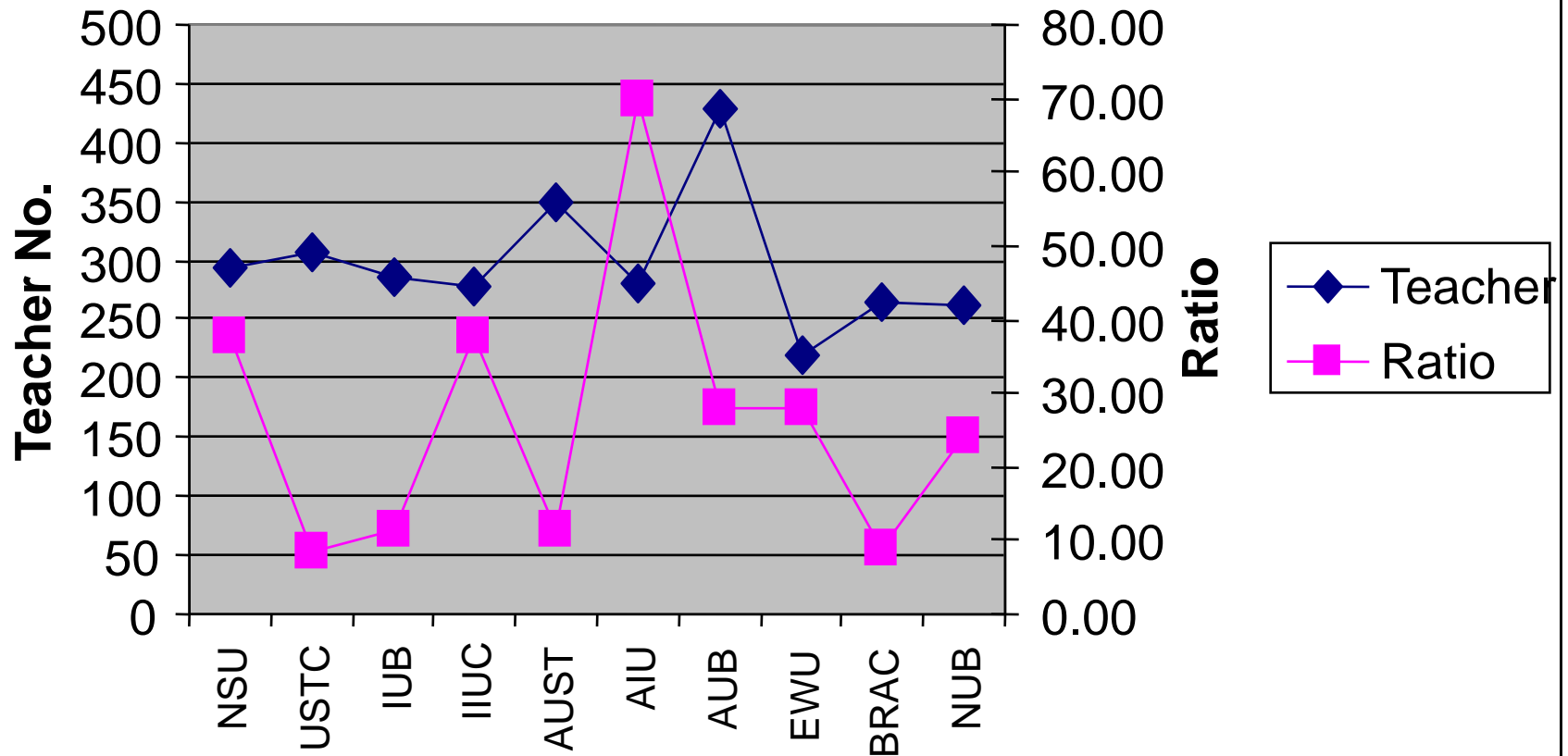
Bangladesh: Private Universities Students

Number & Yearly Recurring Cost, 2008



Graph-2.5

Bangladesh: Private Universities-Teachers & Teacher-Student Ratio, 2008



Performance of Private HEIs- Quality (cont...)

- Expectedly, the private universities represent higher (annual) per capita recurrent cost; the higher estimates observed in cases of University of Science and Technology Chittagong (USTC) (Tk. 96,524/=) and BRAC University (Tk. 95,423/=), closely followed by Independent University of Bangladesh (Tk. 92,770/=); the intermediate situations are observed in cases of International Islamic University, Chittagong (Tk. 43,075/=), Northern University Bangladesh (Tk. 44,017/=).

Performance of Private HEIs- Quality (cont...)

- The HEIs, both public and private in general show sign of dynamism; example, with the changing demands of the country's economy some private universities started offering new and non-traditional courses such as healthcare management, physio-therapy, laboratory science, electronics and telecommunication engineering, ICT (information and communication technology), hotel management and tourism, graphics design and performing arts.

Performance of Private HEIs- Quality (cont...)

- **In terms of outputs : Public universities report relatively a satisfactory level of pass-rate of 77 percent (case of technical graduates) to 98 percent (case of technical post-graduates); the intermediate cases of pass-rates (i.e 83%) in general type of post-graduates. ; the public universities in general enroll relatively better HSC-graduates**

Performance of Private HEIs- Quality (cont...)

- **During 2008, in the case of private universities 32,701 graduates obtained their degrees i.e., on an average 641 students/per university passed out. The highest number passed out form Shanto-Marium University of Creative Technology (i.e., 7280), followed by Asian University of Bangladesh (i.e., 3966), other universities such as North-South University and Northern University Bangladesh produced 1073 and 1430 graduates respectively.**

Performance of Private HEIs- Quality (cont...)

- *External Efficiency*
- Great demand for tertiary level education in the economy -. In the 1980s, the World Bank estimated the (private) return on higher education, ranged between 15 to 20 percent. No definite and recent estimates on (private) return available for Bangladesh.
- A BBA-graduate with a modest grade (e.g. B+) from Northern University Bangladesh expect to get a job in any firm (e.g., private bank, buying house of RMG, real estate company) with a monthly salary of Tk. 15,000/= or more.

Performance of Private HEIs- Quality (cont...)

- The NUB has its own in-house compensation-structure (gross monthly payment) –it goes up from Tk. 47, 00/= (for cleaner/support-staff) to Tk. 24,000/= (for Lecturer.....).; the compensation-rate multiplies by 4 times as the formal educational/schooling year goes up from 10 years to 14 years and then 16 years. See Annex Table-2.
- Mentionable that a significant number of educated unemployed and underemployed in the country. 3

3. Ways Forward

- **On the basis of empirical evidence and the researcher's unstructured information (and some perceptions) a tentative list of things on the quantitative and qualitative aspects of HEIs enumerated; also some thoughts on the world of work.**

Ways Forward (cont...)

- **1. Quantitative issues-More Capacity for Absorption:** *On an average every year 400,000 (HSC-graduates (approximately) are being churned out by the system, they are not getting entrance to good-quality HEIs; try to raise gross-enrollment rate upto 10% by 2015.*
- **Way Forward:** *Help build more capacity/HEIs in different divisional and district-towns; Some liberal financial (e.g., PPP, subsidized bank-loans) policies in this respect*

Ways Forward (cont...)

- **2. Qualitative-Improvement-issues**
- **(a) Better inputs into the system**
- **(b) Improved process and teaching resources**
- **Good number of HEIs (including some private universities, private colleges), do not organize any screening/admission tests; applicants with right aptitudes and reasonable HSC-scores should be allowed to get admission into HEIs**
- **Lack of qualified and motivated teachers**

Ways Forward (cont...)

- **Way Forward:**
- **The private universities should put into effect the Accreditation council (under process) without any loss of time; should be guided by their 'enlightened self-interest'. It (AC) should also take up the audit of academic transactions in the universities.**
- **Teachers should be encouraged to take up research-projects, more research-grants needed from UGC/MoE; private universities should set aside a definite amount (e.g., 10% of the annual budget) for research/training of academic staff.**

Ways Forward (cont...)

- The **universities** (mainly private ones) should try to develop collaborative academic and research programs with US. British, Australian and advanced Asian universities; will help transfer knowledge, skills and upgrade the quality of education

Ways Forward (cont...)

- **3. World of Work-issues**
- **Relevance of academic programs and articulation with employers.**
- **Way Forward:** Private universities should take up at regular interval some tracer-studies of their graduates.
- **The interface between industry and university (especially private ones) should be made regular and strengthened; involvement of industry personnel in course-curriculum development and transaction will help close the gap between the two vital sectors of the economy.**

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THANK YOU

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