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Home » Opinion » Education

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How universities can improve student satisfaction and quality of learning





Universities in Bangladesh should take initiatives to revitalise their education system and adopt modern teaching and learning methods. PHOTO: STAR

MM Shahidul Hassan

Societies in both developed and developing countries are increasingly aware of the vital role that university graduates can play to advance their economies. Many examples can be cited where graduates helped to pull their countries out of recession (David Willetts 2017). One finding of a study on the economic growth in developed countries is that the returns on bachelor's degrees are much greater than that on level 10 and 12 qualifications. The challenge of a university, therefore, is to produce graduates with high-level skills and innovative quality. There are debates brewing on how to satisfy the students' needs, improve the quality of higher education and also to increase the satisfaction level of students at universities. Unfortunately, in this part of the world, particularly Bangladesh, teachers and universities pay little attention to student satisfaction and also to their academic progress. This needs to be changed.

Due to the massification of higher education with a greater range and variety of students, universities have to deal with complex levels of student expectations. They are facing great challenges in handling such variables which are many. First-year students, particularly those that come from the rural areas, usually face more difficulties in adjusting themselves to the university life and also to teaching. They encounter multiple processes and systems within the new environment that in many cases lead to anxiety and frustration. They feel a sense of disconnect and being unaccepted. Universities, therefore, ought to pay greater attention to student satisfaction. Often dissatisfied students withdraw themselves during their first year at university.

From a financial perspective, it has been found that retaining students is more helpful than recruiting new ones. Dropouts also lose interest in pursuing higher studies. Retention of students, particularly new students, is an issue that needs to be addressed seriously by the universities. Orientation programmes can be the first chance to help new students get accustomed to the culture, expectations and resources of a university. Arranging social engagement activities at the orientation can create an opportunity for incoming students to interact with their peers and fellow students. Senior students can speak candidly about their first years at university. This is a great way for new students to get an idea of what to expect and what to aspire to. Also, registering for classes is always a great concern for the first-year students. Therefore, departments must give their students course schedules at the orientation. Departments also should give them an opportunity to meet with their academic advisers. Course instructors can tell their students about the teaching and assessment methods they will follow.

On the other hand, taking the time to explain how the process works at the university can also be extremely helpful. Giving new students access to a financial aid counsellor can be a big help since besides having the courses they want, students and their families are always anxious about the payment of tuition/other fees. Often, all they need during

orientation is reassurance. They might not need all the answers right on the orientation day, but just being empathetic, listening, helping, and giving as much information as a university can will make a lot of difference. Given the importance of orientation, universities can arrange the programmes in two consecutive days. The development of strong and personal connections with their university and its faculty members can definitely alleviate a lot of the issues facing the students.

Undoubtedly, strong connections and relationships have a positive impact on a student's dedication to studying and provide for a more enjoyable learning experience (Bowden, 2013). A sense of belonging is also a fundamental factor for retaining students beyond the first year of enrolment.

Recent researches show that the factors that cause dropout lie not only in students and the situations they face in universities, but also in the very character of the educational settings. Universities abroad have overhauled their teaching, assessment and learning methods. On the contrary, little change has been done in these areas in Bangladeshi universities. Now, the time has come to rethink our education system and bring the necessary changes. The traditional education system adopted by universities doesn't provide students with necessary cognitive knowledge and skills and fulfil the performance expectations. On the other hand, the widely adopted system known as Outcome-Based Education (OBE) transforms education into personalised learning and enables educational institutions to design instruction models tailored to learning preferences of the students. A good, high-quality education is to do with outcomes. A learning outcome refers to what a student can do as a result of a learning experience. It is a result of learning, which is a visible and observable demonstration of three main things—knowledge, combined with competence, combined with orientations. It is these three factors that determine the quality in higher education.

Some changes need to be undertaken in teaching. One of the best ways to improve the quality of teaching in a classroom is for the teacher to guide students to be active learners, rather than mere spectators. Active learning can best be described as a process through which students engage fully with the materials, participate in the class, and collaborate with each other as part of the learning process. Teachers should, therefore, look at ways to facilitate independent, critical, and creative thinking by using active learning techniques. These include student collaboration, asking students to analyse case studies, debates, and discussing new ideas both during lectures and in homework.

It is expected that universities in Bangladesh will take immediate initiatives to revitalise their education system and adopt modern teaching and learning methods. If necessary, they may engage foreign educationists who can help their teachers understand the internationally accepted education systems and how to successfully implement modern teaching and

learning. Universities also need to pay attention to how they can support student success and spread the message that they value each student as an individual.

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