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## **ACADEMIC SUPERVISION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CASE OF GOVERNMENT COLLEGES IN BANGLADESH**

**Md Masud Rana\***

### **Abstract**

Academic supervision is considered an important mechanism to improve the performance of an educational institution. This article aims to investigate the situation of academic supervision in Bangladeshi Government Colleges (GCs). The article, in particular, explores the impacts of academic supervision on Bangladeshi students and teachers in developing their competencies and confidence in post-secondary educational settings. The study was conducted employing the qualitative research method and collecting data from in-depth interviews, secondary published literature, such as books, journal articles etc. The study finds that effective academic supervision considerably helps students

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\* Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Government Syed Hatem Ali College, Barishal Email: [masud\\_16992@yahoo.com](mailto:masud_16992@yahoo.com)

achieve their learning progress as well as teachers attain their professionalization in the GCs of Bangladesh. Various challenges exist in higher education in Bangladesh, which include the lack of resources, limited use of educational tools and technology, policy problems, lack of sufficient training and scope of research for teachers, and so on. This article has made several recommendations for improving academic supervision to enhance quality education in the Bangladeshi GCs.

**Keywords:** Higher education, academic supervision, teaching and learning, Government Colleges, Bangladesh

## Introduction

Higher education is significant for individuals as well as for socio-economic development, although everyone is not ready for receiving higher education. (Kyllonen, 2012) Higher education impacts significantly on socio-political and economic development in developing countries. (Naidoo, 2007) According to Singh and Singh (2015, p.180), “Higher education is the key to success of any nation which boosts the economic potential of the entire nation leading to the development of the whole nation.” Higher education, particularly in the developing countries, is acknowledged as a vital factor for the development as its demand for access is increasing with so many challenges. (Bunoti, 2011) In developing countries, higher education has much potential to promote prosperity. (Mubassar and Muhammad, 2010) Khan et al. (2014) have said, “Tertiary education plays the key role in shaping the innovative thoughts of students and creating a large and effective base of human capital leading to the creation of a knowledge society.” (p.7) In this regard, higher education is considered as the reflection and a fast-growing part of the total education system of a country.

Like many other developing countries, higher education is also important for Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, higher education is meant for education from the undergraduate or post-secondary levels to the tertiary level at the both universities and colleges. (Islam, 2008) In fact, the academic activities of colleges are also operated by a public university, the National University (NU). Government Colleges (GCs) work under the NU, albeit their administrative functions are controlled by the Ministry of Education. In short, the academic aspects of higher education are controlled and operated by public and private universities. Currently, there are 142 universities in Bangladesh; of them 42 are the public and the rest are private universities. In addition, around 2,700 undergraduate and graduate colleges provide higher education where around 600,000 students are enrolled each academic session in Bangladesh (BANBEIS, 2012). Higher educational institutions with this large number of students have become the real centers for teaching and learning. Academic supervision is considered an important tool for developing students' and teachers' proficiencies at the tertiary level. The latest National Education Policy of Bangladesh (MoE, 2010) gives importance to academic supervision and monitoring with a view to developing teachers' performances. Scholars have emphasized on academic supervision and accountability of concerned stakeholders for improving the quality and efficiency of the teachers. (Ullah, 2010) However, in Bangladesh, there are a lot of challenges, which continue to hamper effective academic supervision, especially in the higher education arena.

The standard of higher education in Bangladesh is not up to the mark. (Islam, 2008) According to Aminuzzaman (2011), over the last few years, the quality of higher education has been

deteriorating steadily and the reasons for it need to be addressed properly. Hossain (2016) figures out a few factors which affect educational system and management in higher education including top-level policies, leadership, lack of professionalism, improper planning and bureaucracy leading to quality failure and impacts on total output and development. In addition, the dropout rate in higher education is noteworthy like the primary and the secondary levels in Bangladesh. (Naeema, 2012) These dropouts are mainly caused due to poverty and related factors. The higher level of dropout particularly the dropout of female students in rural areas of Bangladesh is caused by early marriage and sexual harassment. (Hossain, 2016) Naidoo (2007) lists a number of common constraints to the overall standard of higher education and poor performance in most developing countries, such as limited resources, insufficient infrastructure, inexperienced academic staff, and traditional pedagogical practices. The scope of higher education is expanding corresponding to the increase in literacy in rural areas and an upsurge in school enrolment. Yet the standard is not up to the international level. Therefore, further researches are required for improving academic supervision to enhance quality higher education.

Academic supervision remains one of the most vital and significant instruments. Its main objective is to promote students' and teachers' competencies and confidence that ultimately develop a higher educational environment. Academic supervision also helps produce quality graduates, which eventually leads to improving human resource development. The Bangladeshi Government recognizes that academic supervision and monitoring is vital to develop teachers' performance. (MoE, 2010) Effective academic supervision appears to have increased

students' and teachers' confidence and made a significant impact on the improvement of the educational environment. This process is also one of the best ways to address the limitations that are prevailing at the tertiary level. By using professionals' voice, this study explores various aspects of academic supervision, benefits they are gaining, and different aspects of their involvement which are important to them. Furthermore, this study attempts to shed lights on the future development of academic supervision process in ways which are most useful for the quality enhancement of both the students and teachers. Therefore, this study engages in deeply understanding the benefits of effective academic supervision from the post-secondary viewpoints. It also offers several policy recommendations for the improvement and further development of academic supervision in the GCs and higher educational institutions and also the non-government colleges in Bangladesh. This study is expected to add significant contributions to the promotion of an effective supervisory process. A wide range of students and teachers are thought to benefit from this process.

## **Methodology**

This is a qualitative descriptive study based on empirical evidence. Unlike an experimental research, the goal of the descriptive study is not to identify causes and effects but to describe what has already existed. This study aims to examine the characteristics of a present or past situation. (Boudah, 2011) In this sense, "researchers who conduct descriptive research do not manipulate the subject of study in order to determine cause and effect; instead, they seek to describe accurately what is happening." (Boudah, 2011, p.127) As Dawson (2009) points

out that a qualitative approach is more compatible when the research objectives are to examine perceptions and to know the processes, events or circumstances from the perspective of those who have experienced. According to Newby (2014), a qualitative study enables participants to explain their activities or attitudes in such a way so that the researcher's insights come into their reality. Menter et al. (2011) note that collecting quantitative data can assist researchers to identify ordinary designs but it cannot offer profound understanding of the experiences of participants. Since the aim of this research is to learn the experiences of participants, qualitative approach has been used. At the time of data collection or analysis, this strategy emphasizes words instead of quantification. (Bryman, 2012)

The scope of this study is the GCs of Bangladesh. I have selected four GCs to explore and explain the research objectives. As the study is concerned with academic supervision of the GCs of Bangladesh, a sample of several GCs remains quite relevant. Of these GCs, I intensively interviewed eight teachers who have had at least ten years teaching experience and have been directly involved in higher education. The teaching, learning and administrative patterns of all the GCS are almost same. Therefore, the respondents' insights regarding academic supervision of the GCs including its impacts and challenges have hardly varied. Four GCs and their eight teachers' perspectives have thus been representative of the population.

In descriptive research, the researcher can administer a questionnaire or interview in the field of education (Boudah, 2011). A semi-structured interview was the proposed data collection tool. This interview is normally easier to conduct. It allows both the interviewer and the interviewees to arrange a

mutually convenient time. Moreover, the interviewees can feel more relaxed and sometimes they can depend on field notes. (Descombe, 2010) I conducted semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews are suitable for collecting data from a respondent and then compare them with data from other respondents. In this mode of interviews, each respondent is asked similar questions with the flexibility to examine answers should this be assumed mandatory. (Dawson, 2009)

I used purposive sampling technique in this study. Purposive sampling is significant when expert views are required, as Menter et al. (2011) have noted that it is necessary to select people who are likely to provide valuable information that reflects the characteristics of the whole group. The researcher can collect data by using a purposive sample from a typical group of people for a specific purpose. (Leedy and Ormrod, 2015) In fact, the research quality depends on an appropriate method and instrument as well as a suitable sampling strategy. (Cohen et al., 2010) In order to access to the people of profound knowledge regarding particular issues or their professional experiences, purposive sampling can be used to collect valuable information from their deeper understanding about those issues(Cohen et al., 2011). Thus, purposive sampling is a significant strategy for small-scale studies and seemed appropriate for this study as well.

I did a thematic analysis of these qualitative data. With the consent of the participants, I transcribed each interview after doing recording. I revised thoroughly each of the transcripts several times to familiarize myself with the collected data. I emphasized the main points closely related to my study questions and objectives; those were the codes. (Menter et al., 2011) The similar codes were used side by side the transcripts,

new codes were added when new points came up that were not enclosed by the existing points. After careful consideration, these points were then grouped into themes (Creswell, 2015). The themes were named and examined for meaning in relation to the study question and the emergent themes from the review of the literature. (Bryman, 2016)

While conducting interviews and collecting data from the respondents, I adhered to the norms and followed the ethical guidelines of social sciences research, such as participation should be voluntary based on informed consent, right to anonymity and participants' privacy as well as honesty with those involved in the research process. (Leedy and Ormrod, 2015) In fact, these ethical issues were considered at the very beginning of the research planning stage. It is important to inform the possible participants from the researchers that participation is voluntary by nature. (Denscombe, 2010; Leedy and Ormrod 2015) Similarly, participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any time and this information should be given to them in written language so that they can easily understand. (Leedy and Ormrod 2015) At the time of the meeting, participant information letter along with a consent sheet was issued to the participants to sign if they agreed to participate. According to data protection laws, participants' privacy right, as well as anonymity, should be given due respect, and data must be accepted confidentially (BERA, 2011; SERA, 2005; UWS, 2016) I followed all these ethical guidelines and the respondents of this study participated voluntarily and with interest.

### **Academic Supervision in Higher Education**

Academic supervision refers to assisting supervisors in developing the learning process through effective decision-



making (Mackinnon, 2007) For implementing and achieving the objectives of education, the academic supervisor requires maintaining principles, rules and regulations and some prescribed methods. Academic supervision aims at improving teaching and learning through appropriate guidance and planning and augmenting teachers' professionalism and their creative abilities. (Okendu, 2012) Sule (2013) focuses on both internal and external supervision in order to achieve an educational goal and to maintain teachers' job performance. She also emphasized clearly on academic supervision for developing teachers' skill that ultimately contributes to the students' academic progress. Archibong (2010) highlights the importance of instructional supervision that improves teachers' competence and efficiency and unmonitored instruction may hamper the quality of education. This type of supervision improves administration, teachers' professionalism, and student's academic performance.

At the higher education level, both teachers' and students' achievement hinges on the quality of their work. Manseur (2018, p.1) says that "academic supervision refers to supporting and guiding students in the research process to fulfil an academic qualification." Thus, academic supervision is the process in which a student (undergraduate or postgraduate) guided by a teacher, engages in research. Academic supervision also supports the improvement of students' research activities. Academic supervision not only helps students' course work but also research work at an undergraduate or postgraduate level. Affero et al. (2014) note that academic supervision remains an inter-related process for both the supervisor and supervisee and effective supervision can advocate the supervised student's development in order to enable him/her to produce a quality outcome. This statement

emphasizes the role of academic supervision in improving both students' and teachers' proficiency which eventually contributes to the feature of academic research. Without proper academic supervision, it is difficult for the student to produce such quality research work.

In addition, teachers need to supervise students' term paper writing especially the students of final year Honors and Masters Levels. For this, a supervisor needs to show commitment to providing correction and necessary feedback during all the stages of term paper writing which eventually develops students' competencies as well as teachers' professionalism. Kotirde and Yunos (2014) observe that the "basic premise of supervision is that a teacher's instructional behavior affects student learning." (p. 54) In this regard, students have some responsibilities to perform their research work successfully. They are required to follow the supervisors' guidelines, seek support and assistance, and carry out their work accordingly.

Boden et al. (2005) argue that lesser quality academic research of the supervisee is largely caused by the ineffectiveness of the supervision. Janosik et al. (2003) maintain that "[t]he process is dynamic and demands active participation by a staff member and supervisor." (p. 6) The role of a supervisor is different from that of a teacher because of the nature of the supervisory relationship which is didactic, reciprocal and more interactional than the relationship teachers can build with a class of students, no matter how small in size. Supervisors are practically mentors; they guide the supervisees' research work for successful completion and stand by them in every step of the process. (Butler and Cuenca, 2012) In short, effective academic supervision is significant to improve the quality of academic performances as well as

research progress at universities and colleges. This improvement and the development of knowledge can expand the sphere of the existing education system and can eventually contribute to the development of Bangladesh. On the other hand, it is widely recognized that effective education leadership demonstrates the capacity to create the best possible educational atmosphere for the learners and other stakeholders. Thus, academic supervision is inextricably related to academic leadership in higher education.

Leadership is recognized widely as an important factor for the success or failure of an organization. (Collins, 2001; March and Weil, 2005; Northouse, 2015) The importance of leadership is acknowledged in higher education as its impacts are vital for the effectiveness of academic as well as managerial development. This is because for the innumerable barriers in present higher education landscape, for example, a decline in public support, contradictory view regarding the objective of higher education, technological advancement for teaching and learning, and competitive global economy. For addressing these challenges, the demand for concentrating on leadership improvement within colleges and universities is increasingly noticeable (Bolman and Gallos, 2011; Buller, 2014; Gmelch and Buller, 2015; Ruben, 2004; Ruben, De Lisi, and Gigliotti, 2017) Furthermore, Altbach and Davis (1999, p. 3) note, “While academic systems function in a national environment, the challenges play themselves out on a global scale.” In the past, a leader in a particular discipline was satisfactory for academic or administrative leadership within a college or university. But now-a-days, a leader must have broader knowledge about organizational concepts, professional competencies and necessary capabilities in the higher educational landscape on a regular basis. (Ruben, De Lisi, and Gigliotti, 2017)

Gmelch, Hopkins, and Damico (2011) figured out three measures that fulfil the needs and expectations of the administrators of a college or university, such as habits of mind (an understanding of concepts), habits of practice (a demonstration of skills), and habits of heart (a commitment to reflective practice). According to Gmelch and Buller (2015, p.198), “Through academic leadership programs, institutions benefit from making the most effective use of this resource ... and ensuring institutional renewal, effectiveness, and dedication.” Bush (2008) says that in the context of the global economy, governments are to realize that people are their main assets and to make them into a highly skilled workforce requires highly effective educational leadership.

Another significant aspect of higher education is the evaluation of teaching and learning. The evaluation of teaching and learning is important because these are the pre-conditions for ensuring quality education. Now, quality education is considered an international term as it is measured internationally and the universities over the world are compared to each other. The quality of higher education in a country is also an important factor that indicates the status of the higher education sector at an international level. (Vincent-Lancrin and Pfothenauer, 2012) It is needed to consider the importance of students’ learning outside of the curriculum of higher education . (Havnes, 2008) For appropriate learning activities, Biggs (2003) figured out three key points: (i) the curriculum which is taught; (ii) the teaching methods which are used; and (iii) the assessment procedures which are undertaken. An “imbalance in the system will lead to poor teaching and surface learning.” (p. 26) It is noteworthy that assessment is frequently considered as the important powerful

student learning instrument within higher education and in order to enhance their learning, students are given individual feedback after such assessment (Poulos and Mahony, 2008). In this regard, teaching and learning environment should be standardized to the level of international standard. Effective and appropriate academic supervision creates a good teaching and learning environment that enhance students' outcomes which ultimately promote holistic development of the higher education system.

### **Works Entailing Academic Supervision**

Working in the same profession, the participants, by and large, carry out almost similar tasks in their capacity on a routine basis. Apart from the classroom teaching, they have to supervise the tutorial group students. In each session, students are divided into different tutorial groups. A teacher is assigned to supervise a group. Students also require writing their assignments and appearing at the in-course examinations (10-20 marks) for each course. The course teacher is required to notify the students of their respective grade for in-course examination. He/she also requires returning the graded exam papers to the students with necessary feedback and suggestions which help them cut a good figure in their final examinations. In the final year of honors program, students are also required to write monograph/term paper under the guidance of their concerned course teachers. For some disciplines, students have to complete an internship as a partial fulfilment of the requirement of their Bachelor Degrees. They are thus divided into several groups and the course teachers supervise their internship programs.

The participants of this study recognised the significance of academic supervision with regard to both the students' progress

and the teachers' skill development. As Okendu (2012) points out that academic supervision helps to improve the teaching and learning process and enhances the professional growth of the teachers. A respondent informs that "proper academic supervision and guidance can make a significant difference in terms of students' academic achievement. The academic supervisor helps students learn how to write a research proposal, conduct a project, and eventually write an academic/research paper." Students benefit from their supervisors' learning techniques and styles. Their thought process gets developed and they can enhance the horizon of their knowledge and skill. Not only have the students, the teachers also benefited from academic supervision as another respondent suggests that "a student can be benefited from the teacher's proper academic supervision, a teacher, on the other hand, can also be benefited from the student's performance. For example, when a student submits an assignment or a term paper, a teacher may learn something from these activities." Generally a teacher does not have expertise in all the fields of the discipline. Beyond his/her field of interest, he/she can achieve knowledge from his/her students' inquiry and expand his/her areas of interest. Thus, from supervising students, a teacher can also be updated on undiscovered area of knowledge. Another participant responded in this way: "I encouraged the students to write their term papers on current affairs, in this way a teacher can gather current information (or what is happening now) on some socio-economic issues from their writings easily and clearly." This respondent's insights clearly show that academic supervision also helps teachers be introduced with the things what is happening in the academia. Getting updated on latest information of current academic issues and problems is significant for a teacher or an educator.

The various activities of students can promote teacher's competencies in many ways, such as showing good performance in the classroom, critical writing in their assignment or term paper. In this regard, students need to study comprehensively to develop their analytical ability and critical thinking. Another participant replied in the following way: "Although students can sharpen a teacher's talent, teacher's pedagogical competence and professional competence are more important for enhancing students' competencies." In fact, academic supervision is a kind of mutual transaction. Students' and teacher's collaborative work is the key to successful academic supervision. One of the participants supports this view in the following way: "There is a closer connection between a teacher's competence as well as his over-all supervision and students' learning outcomes." However, a senior participant made reference to the national benefit, as shown in the following response: "In the field of higher education, a higher degree of academic supervision indicates a higher degree of quality education, which ultimately ensures a good manpower for a country." Academic supervision contributes to the enhancement of skill of the students, and eventually leads to the increase in the skilled manpower of the nation. For the development of a country, there is no substitute for skilled manpower. Academic supervision thus contributes to national development of a country. It is most significant for a developing country like Bangladesh.

The participants in this study have recognised that academic supervision warrant significant emphasis in tertiary education. Furthermore, some participants made a connection between academic supervision and an overall educational improvement. So it is important to explain how academic supervision process

can be effective. In the following section, it will be discussed based on the participants' insights.

### **Performance, Effectiveness and Accountability**

The participants are in favor of effective academic supervision in order to promote teachers' and students' competencies. Yet when asked about how to effectively perform academic supervision tasks, they provided different opinions. The participants made reference to the performance, effectiveness and accountability that they associated with their involvement in academic supervision. A common response was to follow the rules and regulations. A respondent thus says that "it is important to pay attention to proper planning and guidance for an appropriate academic supervision. At the same time, teachers' professionalism and their creative capabilities are highly required." Teachers' responsibility of planning, supervision and creativity in supervision is also significant for effective academic supervision. It is a teacher who shoulders responsibility how to mold his/her students into an enlightened team. Leadership in education as well as procedural aspects are also related to this case. A respondent opines: "Effective academic supervision depends on the combination of both effective educational leadership as well as proper educational management. The former is theoretical (policy-oriented) and the latter is practical (application related)." A good educational policy along with efficient educational leadership can influence academic supervision. The question of good governance in education and research is thus significant. The role of the State is crucial to ensure good governance in the State in terms of macro-level and in the educational institutions in terms of micro-level administration and governance.



Kotirde and Yunos (2014) argue that the effective supervision process can be ensured by maintaining policies, rules, regulations and prescribed methods aiming at achieving educational objectives. While Glickman et al. (2001) say that a knowledge base, interpersonal skills, and technical skills are necessary for effective supervision. A respondent has viewed: Some of the participants expressed as the following: “An appropriate academic supervision largely depends on the personality of the teacher that includes academic skills, leadership skills, and communication skills.” This respondent has emphasised on the qualities of teachers for ensuring a useful academic supervision. However, the quality of students is also deemed significant. The academic strengths of students are also related to an effective supervision. A respondent has noted: “Fruitful academic supervision depends not only on the teacher’s performance but also on the student’s performance. It is, in fact, a mutual activity and both of them have some responsibilities.” Students’ academic efforts, sincerity and commitment help improve supervision. As Robinson (2017) argues that it is the right of the supervisor to expect a high level of commitment from the supervisee. The supervised students should react positively, and the supervisor’s comments, advice, and feedback should be responded passionately and carefully. Nonetheless, teachers’ sincerity and commitment are also a matter of effective supervision. Sincere and committed teachers can easily influence his/her students and can make a long-lasting footprints on the latter’s minds. A respondent thus viewed: “A teacher’s pedagogical skills are important so that students get attracted and influenced. In addition, teacher’s timely response and necessary feedback are more important which inspire the students for their active participation.” Students’ and teachers’ mutual interaction

demonstrates a high level of effective academic supervision. Academic environment is a significant factor, as reflected in the following comment by a respondent: “A good educational environment develops a cordial relationship between the teacher and the student that ultimately enhances effective academic supervision. Administrative authority can ensure congenial educational environment.” The entire education system is thus related to academic supervision. Institutional environment is a part of the total academic system and it cannot be seen as a solitude phenomenon. Another participant has correctly pointed out that “academic supervision should be considered taking into account the whole education system. It cannot be considered in isolation.” Academic supervision works within the broader framework of the national education policy and management.

The participants’ responses regarding effective academic supervision clearly reveal that it involves mainly four types of responsibilities: Firstly, the policy and administrative leadership; secondly, teachers’ professionalism; thirdly, students’ active participation; and fourthly, both teachers’ and students’ mutual activities. The students’ active participation and teachers’ professionalism are the two main elements for the success of the supervisory process. Teachers’ accountability on both moral and administrative grounds are significant. A respondent emphasized on the moral ground: “I am accountable to my conscience first and foremost as I am involved in this profession. Whenever a person is involved in any kind of job, s/he has to perform the assigned duty honestly and sincerely, primarily from the moral point of view.” Another respondent explained his sense of accountability: “I remain anxious about my students’ performance. When I hear that my students have

done well, I feel happy. But when I know that one of my students has done badly, it hurts me, as a teacher, seriously. In this way, I feel a kind of accountability to my students as well.” Another respondent thinks of the matter in the same line of moral ground: “I am accountable to my work. A sense of responsibility always reminds me to do my job as effectively as I can. I never think that somebody can check my performance as I do my works consciously. I try to make my students satisfied of the highest manner. However, accountability to conscience is not enough for effective and successful deliberation of responsibilities. Administrative and procedural accountability is also mandatory. Teachers and supervisors also emphasized on it, as has been reflected in a respondent’s response: “At first, I am accountable to my senior colleagues and head of the Department; secondly, I am responsible to my College authority; and finally, to the government who pays for my works and appointed me for doing this job.” Teachers and supervisors have to work under certain laws, rules and regulations, which compel them to ensure their accountability. Thus, the participants in this study have referred to three types of accountability. Some of them feel accountable to their conscience, some referred to administrative and procedural accountability, and some respondents have noted that they are accountable to their students.

### **Challenges of Academic Supervision**

The participants in this study overwhelmingly responded to the challenges of academic supervision in higher education. They indicated that many of these challenges were related to the broader national policies of education and decisions of the authority. Unlike the Western and developed countries,

Bangladesh is lagging behind in terms of quality and standard of academic supervision in the arena of higher education. A participant notes that:

The overall scenario of higher education in Bangladesh stands poor and disadvantaged compared to the Western and developed countries. In fact, the annual budget for higher education is limited compared to the requirement. Academic supervision also suffers in this respect. To make an effective academic supervision in higher education, these challenges need to be resolved.

The challenges in higher education are not going unnoticed and undiscussed. Bangladeshi scholars and educators have been speaking out of these phenomena over the years. The media has also focused on the problems in higher education with utmost importance. As the Economist Report (2013) shows that South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, continue to encounter challenges in higher education and research. A significant challenge is that there is well shortages of teachers according to the ratio of the students, who are enrolled in each academic session, eventually adversely affect the task of academic supervision. A respondent has thus stated:

Teacher-student ratio is very high at the undergraduate and graduate levels in most Government Colleges (GCs). In each academic year, almost 250-300 students are enrolled only at the undergraduate level of a discipline. Almost 200-250 students are also enrolled at the graduate level. However, the number of teachers in a department is extremely insufficient. On an average, a department is constituted by only 6-12 teachers. The ratio of teachers compared to the number of students seriously hampers the academic functioning of the department. The teachers, apart from their classroom teaching,

have to engage in many other works, such as evaluating a large number of answer scripts, doing administrative jobs etc., which create a burdensome academic load and stress for them. This heavy load on teachers also affects academic supervision.

The recruitment of teachers lies in the decision of the Government. There are many vacant posts in almost each of the GCs. There is a formal organogram concerning the number of teachers in each college. Yet it almost always remains unfulfilled. Beyond the shortage of teachers, some respondents also refer to the lack of quality students as a challenge for academic supervision:

Due to the increased number of students, it is difficult to maintain the supervisory process effectively. It is a fact that students primarily opt for admission in public universities. Those who do not qualify for enrolment in public universities mostly got admitted in the GCs or the private universities. Truly speaking, these relatively poor quality students usually do not remain serious about their academic affairs.

Around 600,000 students get enrolled at the undergraduate level in the GCs annually in Bangladesh (BANBEIS 2012). The GCs do not have adequate resources in properly handling this large number of students. Naidoo (2007) also noted this in the context of the developing countries by highlighting several constraints such as unskilled academic staff, traditional pedagogical practices, and limited resources. As a developing country, Bangladesh is not an exception to this case. Another participant highlighted the lack of sufficient budget in the entire education system, including higher education. He explained:

We need to find out the root causes of the prevailing challenges in higher education as well as academic

supervision. If we look deep into the matter, it is clear that the poor budgetary allocation in the overall education sector is the fundamental reason for most problems existing in both higher education and primary as well as secondary education.

It is true that Bangladesh is a developing country and has financial limitations. Yet there are many developing countries which are even poorer than Bangladesh. Notwithstanding they spend more money in education than those of Bangladesh. The UN has suggested that at least 5-6% of the GDP should be spent in the education sector. Bangladesh has been spending just 1.5-2% of its GDP in education for last several decades, while countries like Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Burundi, etc. have been investing in their education 4-6% of their GDP (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020). Thus there is no substitute for investing more money in education in Bangladesh.

The medium of instruction in the GCs is mostly Bengali. However, most of the books in higher education remain in the English version. Even, there is a meagre number of books translated from English to Bengali. The Bangla Academy, a Government-run institute, working for the promotion of Bengali language and culture, and other institutions have translated a number of books from English and other languages to Bengali. Still, there is a dearth of sufficient translated books. This factor also affects teaching and learning in the GCs. A respondent said:

Most of the books are written in English. There are only a few books translated from English to Bengali. Students of the GCs in particular are mostly not comfortable with consulting books of the English version. Therefore, it is often difficult

for the teachers to translate a whole book so that students can directly benefit from them.

However, the respondent's argument mostly blames the students, which seems to be, as if, declining the responsibilities of the teachers. Because, if books are not available in Bengali, it is the teachers who should translate them into Bengali for their student's benefit. Furthermore, teachers should come forward to writing the texts in Bengali so that students can easily access them. In higher education, only knowledge-dissemination is not enough. Knowledge-production is also significant. Teachers have to carry out this responsibility. The problem is, in this respect, that there is hardly any incentives, may be they monetary or in case of job promotion, for this work. In the GCs, a teacher's research or generation of knowledge can hardly receive any official recognition. For example, teachers' promotion does not depend on their research and publications but several non-academic conditions practiced for decades in the civil service. As has been noted earlier that the teachers of the GCs are under the administrative control of the civil bureaucracy and thus they do enjoy no autonomy or academic freedom.

Several other respondents refer to campus politics, lack of adequate library facilities, and shortage of non-academic staff as also some other challenges for higher education as well as academic supervision in the GCs. According to a respondent:

The political practice of both teachers and students in the campus are a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. Sometimes students create chaos in the campus on political issues. In addition, session jam (which hampers the timely completion of courses), inadequate library facilities and insufficient number of official staff hamper total educational environment.

Political parties have their student wings in the campus. Students involved in those organizations are more active in politics than participating classes and studies. Local leaders tend to expand their influence in constituencies by patronising and using these students and organizations. Students connected to political power tend to exert undue pressure on teachers and the college administration. Often, inter-party feuds as well as intra-party factionalism create instability in the campus. Beyond student politics, the teachers are often involved in politics. These teachers also tend to make relationship with the local leaders to augment their influence in both the campus and the locality. Politically-active teachers are highly susceptible to partisanship and becoming unable to discharge their academic responsibilities objectively. Other researchers, such as Islam (2014), have also found that campus politics greatly hampers both teaching and learning.

## **Conclusion**

Academic supervision remains a significant task in higher education. Academic supervision leads to effective teaching and learning and eventually helps students achieve their learning outcomes. It also helps teachers improve their professionalism. Effective academic supervision needs a mutual interaction between the student and the teacher, which is important for developing a conducive academic environment in the arena of higher education. Students can also be benefitted from academic supervision in terms of developing their critical thinking and analytical ability.

In Bangladesh, there is a phalanx of challenges in higher education and academic supervision as has been overwhelmingly



appeared in the words of the respondents. These challenges include, *inter alia*, the limited budget in the education sector in general and the higher education sector in particular, the lack of adequate resources in promoting education, the shortage of teachers according to the ratio of the students, the lack of skilled non-academic staff, the language problem, the absence of stressing on research and publication, the bureaucratic control of higher education and the absence of academic freedom and autonomy, and unhealthy politics in the campus. These challenges greatly hamper in the process of higher education and academic supervision. The public university teachers in Bangladesh consume autonomy and academic freedom, and they can enormously contribute to the production of knowledge. Public universities also emphasize on research and publication. However, the teachers of the Government Colleges (GCs) are directly controlled by the State. Research and publication has almost no appreciation in the GCs. There is hardly any research fund for teachers and students of the GCs. Therefore, most teachers remain disinterested in pursuing research. They mostly contribute to knowledge dissemination rather than knowledge creation. There are a limited number of teachers who pursue further studies and research work merely on their own interest. Still, the lack of fund for research precludes these interested teachers from undertaking large-scale research projects.

In order to ensure effective academic supervision and surmount the challenges in the higher education sector, especially in the GCs, several recommendations for the policy-makers and the concerned stakeholders have been made: First, investment in the higher education sector should be increased; second, research and publication should be underscored in the GCs and research

funds should be introduced and allocated among the teachers and students; third, there should be an adequate training and skill development programs for the teachers; students' active engagement in the classes and other academic pursuits should be ensured; fourth, technical and technological support in the GCs should be enhanced; and fifth, the current trend of party politics in the campus should, at least, be reformed and reorganized, if not banned, and academic freedom should be guaranteed.

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