Teachers' Perceptions of Institutional Quality Assurance in Higher Education: A Case of a Bangladeshi Public University

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ABSTRACT

The fundamental target of the self-assessment is to assist institutions to in improving the quality of education and setting priorities in improvement plan as per requirements of relevant stakeholders and following the vision of a nation which requires a huge self-inspiration of faculty members' within the organization. Universities in Bangladesh have already completed a self-assessment programme and this paper aims to investigate faculty members' perception and perceived change impact of organizational self-assessment process on academic units using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The SAC members' perception on the self-assessment process is collected using likert scale. Overall, mean score implies that SA members are convinced with the standards set for SA process. Organizational improvement priorities and perceived change impacts are identified through Nvivo and in-depth interviews respectively. Although there are some priorities set by them cannot be executed without a grant, only a few departments are chipping away at their improvement plan. However, it is reported that, there is a big change happened in the affective domain of faculty members.

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Context and Background

The evolution of several regional international quality assurance networks in many parts of the world inspires the promotion of quality assurance in higher education institutes in Bangladesh. As an umbrella agency International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) provides a global quality enhancement platform for internal and external quality assurance in higher education. Among the SARRC countries, Bangladesh is the only one left out of INQAAHE. It is argued that Bologna Process has promoted quality assurance and encouraged the creation regional quality assurance system in higher education (Huisman, 2012; Laze, 2021; Verhoeven & De Wit, 2022). Similarly, quality assurance activities in Bangladesh are carried out to comply with the conditions of inqaahe recognition (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, 2018). University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGC) secured Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) membership. It creates the opportunity for higher education institutes in Bangladesh to gain support from Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC) as a World Bank and UNESCO partnership scheme.

To promote quality culture in the HEIs of Bangladesh, Self-assessment (SA) of study programs has been initiated. Assessment is seen as an opportunity for rethinking everyday actions and reflecting on organisations in terms of their strengths and areas for improvement (Ruben et al., 2007). The process of SA is beneficial in establishing a collective means of investigative background and forming development priorities. It also provides a foundation for an operational strategic plan and organisational change (Ruben, 2004). The SA practice is an effective way of deep understanding existing circumstances through descriptive SWOT analysis (Dyson, 2004). It also helps judge the overall efficiency of programs and academic processes and provides a window to realise a deep understanding of the areas needed to improve. Among the various approaches to institutional assessment, Malcolm Baldrige's model has been most influential (Winn & Cameron, 1998) until World Bank established Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC) to support quality assurance in higher education in developing countries.

The SA programme aims to assist institutes in improving the quality of education, addressing the requirements of relevant stakeholders, and following the vision of a nation. With this end in view, departments, through SA exercise, recognise adapting needs, survey the instructing learning limit, and audit the current strategies and arrangements of the university.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

This conceptual framework provides a clear structure for the study outlining the key concepts that will be used to achieve the study objectives. It also highlights the interrelationships between these concepts, showing how Teachers' perceptions of the SA process may influence the establishment of priorities and the perceived change impact.

Quality assurance cells, initiated by UGC, started operation in the Universities of Bangladesh

in 2014 to promote a quality culture within the tertiary education institutes in Bangladesh to ensure good practices and governance. Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) was established in the universities of Bangladesh to promote a quality assurance culture in academic and administrative activities in line with the predefined indicators(University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, 2016) of quality assurance. IQAC assisted through self-assessment activities in the departments/institutes of a university assists in improving the quality of education by setting priorities in the improvement plan as per requirements of relevant stakeholders following the vision of a nation.
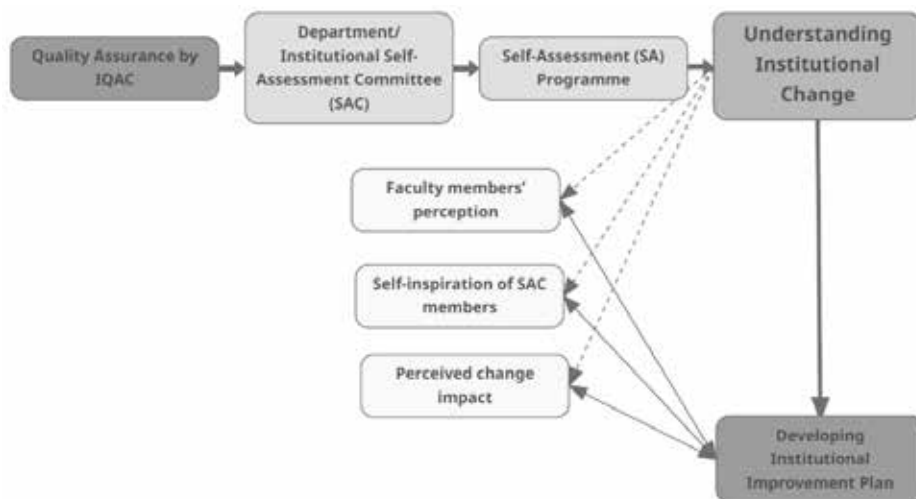

Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework*

Self-Assessment Process

The Self-Assessment (SA) Process is a methodology of assessing the qualities and shortcomings of the universities and as well as the academic programs through which the nature of standards are being fulfilled or not, and what improvement measures are to be taken to upgrade the quality education (Aburizaizah, 2022; Lee & Quazi, 2001; Temponi, 2005). It is critical to inspect the different boundaries of education of a department, for example, the norm of the educational plan, nature of instructing picking up, testing framework, test designs, test examining and test procedures, learning conditions, workforce strength, research climate, and research quality, about recent literature, and also concerning other countries of the world. Such an assessment can assist a department with distinguishing the current attributes and shortcomings to defeat the defects and improve their general norm, which is significant in the present globalised world for a worldwide cross-outskirt rivalry in the occupation market. Sometimes, self-evaluation is done because the heads of an institution or an outside agency request it. It is vital to have substantial inside inspiration to go for self-evaluation. Self-appraisal is fundamentally finished with the soul of cooperation by including all the gatherings of the substance or foundation.

It warrants solid institutional help and responsibilities to augment self-appraisal advantages. SA process is initiated and conducted by the departments/institutes in the public university in Bangladesh. The process involves a systematic review of the unit's performance, operations, and activities to identify areas for improvement and establish priorities for change.

IQAC and Self-Assessment

Quality comes out of a well-structured process or system. This system refers to institutional arrangements, including infrastructure, functional statutory bodies, organisational setup, evidence of good practices, and guiding principles for education (Self-Assessment Manual, 2016). University Grant Commission identified some Quality Assurance Areas (Governance, Curriculum Content Design & Review, Student Admission Progress and Achievements, Physical Facilities, Teaching - Learning and Assessment [Teaching Learning, Quality Staff, Appropriate teaching-learning methods, Use of Lesson plan and Technology integration], Student Support Services, Staff and Facilities, Research and Extension and Continuous Improvement) (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, 2015). There is a 3-member (usually senior and experienced Teachers) Self-Assessment (SA) Committee (function for one year) in every department/institute of the university. Primarily Self-Assessment Committee (SAC) is responsible for conducting SA and developing a 4-years improvement plan. SAC, with the assistance of IQAC supposed to initiate a Quality Assurance culture primarily by running institutional SA. IQAC of the sampled university has completed implementing the SA Programme in three phases. Some SACs of departments and institutes have completed their SA programme and are implementing their four-year improvement plan. Since there is no organisational mechanism to measure the impact of the SA programme on the department/ institutes, this study is the first of its kind to measure the effect.

Teachers' Perception

Teachers' perceptions about the organisational self-assessment (SA) process are complex and can be influenced by several factors. These include their past experiences with organisational assessment, their understanding of the SA process, their expectation, and the sustenance they receive from the university administration while administering SA. Prior experiences of faculties must shape their perception of the SA process, and their understanding of the process affects their engagement and commitment to the assessment. Additionally, Teachers may have specific expectations about what the SA process should achieve, such as improving teaching and research activities or increasing administrative efficiency. The university administration's level of support and resources can also affect Teachers' perceptions of the SA process.

Institutional Priorities

Institutional priorities create organisational structures that allow for collaboration among various roles and parts of the institution (Morgan et al., 2021). During the organisational self-assessment process, priorities are established based on the assessment results. These priority

Teacher's World: Journal of Education and Research, Vol. 48, Issue 2, December 2022
E-ISSN 2959-5738 (Online); ISSN-L: 0040-0521 (Print)

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areas require attention and improvement within the departments. Priorities include changes to teaching methods, research activities, administrative procedures, or other areas that influence academic activities. Since the SA process enables institutes to focus their efforts and resources on the most significant areas of need, leading to effective change and improvements in the academic environment, establishing priorities is a critical step in the SA process.

Perceived Change Impact

After the priorities are established, Teachers in the departments/institutes evaluate the changes due to the self-assessment (SA) process. This evaluation helps to identify both positive and negative impacts of the changes and assesses the challenges to achieving the priorities set in the SA (Audia et al., 2015). Positive effects may include improved teaching methods, increased research activity, or more efficient administrative procedures. Negative impacts may have increased workload, changes that were not implemented effectively, or unintended consequences of the changes. Teachers can also identify challenges to achieving the priorities, such as a lack of resources or resistance to change. Understanding the changes and challenges faced by the departments/institutes is crucial in assessing the effectiveness of the SA process and making improvements for future assessments.

Research Questions

The quality assurance process is a new initiative and has not yet been explored in Bangladesh's higher education context. Specifically, the limited literature on QA has largely overlooked the views of Teachers on the SA process and its impact. This study aims to evaluate the immediate impact of the self-assessment programme on the departments/ institutes. The purpose of this study is not only to analyse the perception on the SA processes. Rather it aims to illuminate to what extent the SA process has led departments/institutes to their desired changes. It aims to answer the following research questions -
1. How do SAC members perceive the organisational self-assessment process?
2. What are the institutional priorities (intended change) established during the SA program?
3. How do the SAC members perceive the change impact of quality assurance activities?

Methodology

One public university in Bangladesh was selected purposefully to serve the purpose of the study. Despite having numerous methods, different models, and frameworks to conduct institutional SA programme effectiveness is often anecdotal and unsystematic. Most higher education institutes have yet to develop a comprehensive approach to carry out a systematic impact evaluation of quality assurance (Bejan et al., 2015). Ruben has measured seven Baldrige

organisational assessment model indicators using a Likert scale (Ruben et al., 2007). A rating scale is used to determine content validation of quality assurance indicators used for self-assessment of academic programs at universities. Using a five-point scale, this study measures the perception of members (research question 1) who participated in the SA programme. Six departments/institutes were selected, and their self-assessment reports were collected to identify institutional priorities (research question 2). The impact of quality assurance activities (research question 3) was measured by identifying planned activities and self-reported progress, SAC member's interview according to their improvement plan.

Table

Research Coordination Matrix

Research Objectives	Research approach	Sample	Data Collection tools	Data analysis
1. How do SAC members perceive the organisational self-assessment process?	Quantitative	21	Survey Questionnaire using google forms	Statistical Analysis
2. What are the institutional priorities (intended change) established during the SA program?	Qualitative	Randomly selected 6 cases	Document analysis Descriptive note-taking	Thematic analysis, Word Cloud using NVIVO
3. How do the SAC members perceive the change impact of quality assurance activities?	Qualitative	Expert Sampling (8)	Interview	Thematic analysis

The Case

The chosen university is among the largest universities in Bangladesh, with a significant number of students. It has a democratic culture and operates with independent status under the 1973 Act. The university comprises 12 faculties and six (6) institutes, offering a wide range of programs in humanities, sociology, law, medicine, applied and pure sciences, business studies, agriculture, and fine arts, through its 59 departments (University of Rajshahi, 2023). The university provides undergraduate, postgraduate, M.Phil, and Ph.D. degrees and professional degrees offered in night or weekend shifts in some departments/institutes.

Sampling Procedure

The selected university ran the SA Programme in 47 departments and institutes and implemented the SA programme in three phases. The present study attempted to reach all the SAC members (167) by sending Google forms and requesting to participate in a web survey. 21 SAC members responded. Six (6) heads of the SACs from 47 were selected purposely to participate in the interviews. This study attempts total population sampling to measure the perception of SA committee members. IQAC has implemented the SA programme in three phases. To address research question 2, a random sampling method has been applied for sample selection. During the survey, SAC members were asked whether they would participate in interviews. Those who have given their consent to participate in interviews have been contacted. In cases where the SAC head refused to participate in interviews with other members, the selected topics were also contacted via telephone.

Data collection tools

To address research question 1, a five-point rating scale was developed to explore SAC members' perceptions of the SA process using a Google form. Individuals who participated in IQAC SA programs have been contacted by email. The email requests to complete a ten-minute web-based survey system. Respondents got assurance that their anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained. Document analysis is done to analyse the priorities (intended change, research question 2) established during the SA program. Document analysis of selected cases is done using NVIVO qualitative data analysing software. Mainly this process involves a query of word frequency and analysis of coded data made while reviewing case documents. Research question 3 measures and examines the impact. This phase involves in-depth interviews with each of the heads of SAC of their departments. An open interview schedule was developed to conduct the interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to find out what institutional changes the departments/institutes have achieved from the improvement priorities established during the SA program. Each interview takes approximately 20 minutes in length.

Findings
SAC members' perception of the self-assessment process
This section reports the SAC members' perception on the SA process. SAC members' opinion was collected using a 5-point scale.

Table 2
SAC members' perception from the survey

Statements	Mean Score
1. Nine predefined standards in SA Manual are good enough for programme self-assessment.	4.19
2. It is not meant to measure governance at the departmental level since many actors ensure governance at the departments/institutes and universities.	3.81
3. Self-Assessment process facilitated integrating the process to redesign, modernise, and update the curriculum according to the workplace requirements.	4.52
4. Departments should identify students' learning needs and record student achievements.	4.95
5. Standards for assessing physical facilities are enough to be considered for quality education.	2.86
6. Factors assessed during SA activities can be considered enough for teaching-learning.	3.76
7. Assessment of higher-order learning is conveyed through Self-Assessment.	3.45
8. SA programme assesses the student support service appropriately.	3.52
9. SA programme recognises the importance of staff development.	4.14
10. SA programme advocates an internal quality assurance system within the department level.	4.33
11. SA programme is a significant effort to analyse SWOT and prepare an Institutional development plan.	4.52

SAC members were asked to what extent they agree that the nine predefined standards in SA Manual are good enough for programme self-assessment. A mean score of 4.19 means they are convinced with the standards set for measuring the perception of SAC members. Despite appreciating the initiatives taken to evaluate the SA manual designed by the IQAC for assurance, some issues were raised by the respondents.…

> *The questionnaire is not well prepared to find out the weakness or strengths of the standards set to assess the quality of education rendered by an entity (institute/ department). Some questions are not meaningful and correct, somewhat confusing. I hope a comprehensive and carefully constructed questionnaire will be designed to strengthen further the research for improving SA protocol (survey 11).*

However, departments/institutes were advised to rephrase those data collection instruments if required. Respondents were asked whether it is meaningful to measure governance at the departmental level; the mean score (3.81) explains that it is still significant to measure

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E-ISSN 2959-5738 (Online); ISSN-L: 0040-0521 (Print)

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governance at the departmental level. The mean score of 4.52 shows that respondents agree that the SA process facilitated integrating the process to redesign, modernise, and update the curriculum according to workplace requirements. There is a high level (4.95) of agreement that departments should identify students' learning needs and keep records of the student's achievements. Respondents agree that the SA programme recognises the importance of staff development and advocates an internal quality assurance system at the department level.

In contrast, the mean score of 2.86 indicates that standards for assessing physical facilities are insufficient for quality education. SAC members fairly agreed on factors that are assessed during SA activities can be considered enough for teaching-learning (Assessment of higher-order learning is conveyed; and SA programme assesses the student support service properly. However, the mean score of 4.52 reflects that the SA programme is a significant effort in doing a SWOT analysis and preparing an Institutional development plan.

The following graph is the result of the survey participated by the SAC members. Figure 2 indicates the attitude of the members towards the physical facilities as an integral part of quality learning, while Figure 3 represents the essential key facts for teaching learning and assessment. Overall, most participants agreed that clean and hygienic sanitary facilities for both men and women are the fundamental need to ensure quality learning opportunities. Also, most were concerned about the qualified and efficient academic staff as mandatory for teaching, learning, and assessment.

Figure 2:
Facilities considered to be an integral part of the quality learning
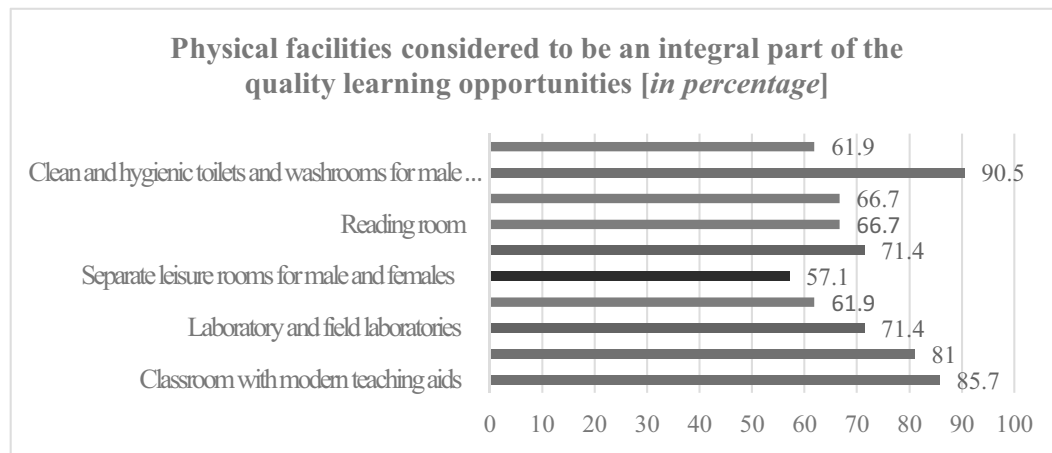
It was found that among the ten physical facility categories, the highly demanding services (more than 80 percent) were hygienic washrooms, proper internet facilities in e-learning materials, and classrooms with modern technologies in case of physical facilities of quality learning. On the other hand, people had given the least priority to separate relaxation rooms

for males and females. Teachers' attitude towards having auditorium and reading room accommodation was equal (66.7 percent).

> *Infrastructural development is a key to educational development, where we still lag. Only curriculum development and effective student-teacher interaction are not enough to ensure quality education. More thoughts should be given on this issue (survey 3).*

Figure 3:

Factors considered to be crucial for teaching learning and assessment

Factors considered to be crucial for teaching learning and Assessment
[Shown in percentage]
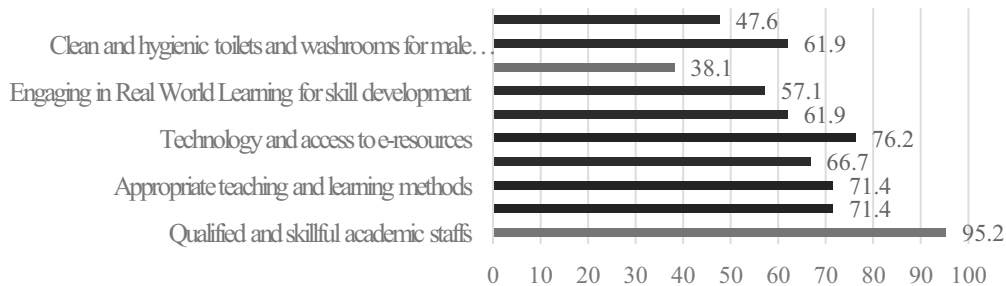
In teaching learning assessment, teachers showed the least interest in having theater and auditoriums. They considered technological support, teaching-learning methods, technical and administrative support, and efficient academic staff the most critical factors (more than 70 percent in all cases).

Priorities established during the SA and preparing improvement plan

The data for SA were collected through a questionnaire survey from five categories of respondents. They answered questions under different parameters. The participants in the survey were asked to score each statement from 1 to 5, where one (1) was unsatisfactory, and five (5) were excellent. The SA reports highlight research, labs, and equipment concerns and identifies weaknesses in governance, assessment, and institutional structure. Institutional facilities were estimated through infrastructure, library, and teacher's office, and shortcomings and limitations are highlighted in each case.

Figure 4:

Improvement Plan Word Cloud

Setting a mission and vision for governance got the highest priority. Formulating committees for stating objectives, course evaluation, and updating departmental websites is the second priority. Other priorities include documentation, academic calendar, data access, etc. Almost all the departments/institutes consider curriculum redesigning focusing on objectives, intended learning outcomes, content, and assessment guidelines. Seeking the opinion of stakeholders, curriculum experts, and alumni has become their priority during curriculum development. Departments/Institutes are concentrating more on student admission rather than keeping and maintaining their progress reports. Renovation of existing rooms and laboratories got the priority, followed by improvement of classroom facilities and office equipment, seminar library facilities, the establishment of technology, and separate common room and washroom facilities for female and male students. The sampled cases aim to establish - 1) a staff development Programme for teaching excellence; 2) an innovative and interactive teaching pedagogy through lesson plans; 3) continuous assessment strategies using Bloom's Taxonomy; 4) a policy for assessing student performance; 5) an automated result processing system; and 6) course evaluation by students. Departments/institutes target that alumni activities should be strengthened. Staff training got a top priority. The staff development programme, peer teaching, and skill development are promised through capacity development mechanisms, workshops, performance appraisals, and the development of key performance indicators (KPIs) for academic and administrative staff. The most important thing for research and extension is collaboration. The following priorities are industry relations, research capacity building, and journal publication. Departments/institutes have focused on an internal quality system. The next priority was the installation of a Management Information System (MIS), progress monitoring, time-bound reporting, performance indicators, feedback, and control, etc.

Perceived change impacts of the self-assessment programme

Perceived change impact of the SA programme and challenges identified by asking the following questions during interviews-

Q1. Since you have already developed an improvement plan, what is the status of that plan, and are you working on the plan?

Q2. Is there any target that could be implemented without financial support?

Q3. What are the challenges of achieving those targets?

Q4. How can departments overcome those challenges?

Departments/institutes received a fund from IQAC in the SA project. They were supposed to work within that fund when they made this plan. The fund did not come from the department's initiative. The improvement plan was made four years after the SA project. Since the first phase was done well enough, the core of the improvement plan was to get a fund, and with that fund, the subsequent work would be started. Most departments/institutes are stuck with the concept that the work will begin as soon as they receive the grant for implementing the proposed improvement plan. Although some priorities they set cannot be executed without a grant, only a few departments are chipping away at their improvement plan. Some aspects of the improvement plan can be implemented without monetary support. Preparing students' handbook for example, can be done with a minimum financial cost. Setting a code of conduct, active grievance committee, and providing remedial feedback does not cost anything other than mindset.

> *We need experts to bring uniformity and verify the learning outcomes are meaningful. Some departments got an allocation for curriculum development after the SA project. And based on that, some university departments have developed their curriculum. But I don't know if there have been any other improvements (Interview 2).*

To build up a shared focal lab, University specialists need to step up to the plate. Classes are now under monitoring whether courses are covered fully before the examination, and results are being published regularly. Initiatives have been taken to form the Alumni committee, and alumni were invited during curriculum modification. Initiatives have been taken to establish shared laboratories.

> *There is a significant change in the affective domain. Working on this committee has had a significant impact, on me, at the same time, on my acquaintances (Interview 5)*

Challenges of Implementing an institutional development plan

The department alone cannot implement all the planned activities due to faculties disagreement. Some faculties argued that teachers should have autonomy regarding academic freedom, not in terms of not performing their duties. The students' handbook, appointing a student advisor, grievance committee, remedial learning support system, counseling, monitoring center, and placement cell can be done without spending any money, which will be helpful to the students. Although some departments have taken a plan of peer observation of teachers' class

Teacher's World: Journal of Education and Research, Vol. 48, Issue 2, December 2022
E-ISSN 2959-5738 (Online); ISSN-L: 0040-0521 (Print)

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performance, most interviewees think the idea is incompatible with the concept of university or faculty. Some interview participants argued that internal quality assurance had contributed positively by increasing awareness of teaching quality issues at institutes. At the same time effects of SA have been more focused on increasing bureaucracy rather than making substantive improvements in quality education. Teachers opinioned that the SA programme will be counted as more effective only if the accreditation council starts to rank universities within the country, set their status accordingly, and provide fair rewards to university departments.

Discussion

The study's findings bring valuable perceptions of SAC members regarding the SA process and the predefined standards in the SA manual. Since preparing this Self-Assessment Operations Manual involved consulting several reports, articles, and QA manuals, Teachers have a positive attitude toward the SA process (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, 2016). The mean scores indicate that SAC members agree with the predefined standards set for self-assessment. Self-assessment reports explicitly show that the most demanding services were hygienic washrooms, proper internet facilities in e-learning materials, and classrooms with modern technologies. In terms of teaching and learning assessment, Teachers prioritised technological support, teaching and learning methods, technical and administrative support, and efficient academic staff. Quality education cannot be ensured solely through curriculum development and student-teacher interaction. Universities worldwide are closely focused on the quality of studies and the other services provided by modern universities (Lamanauskas, 2008). Priorities identified during self-assessment include research, laboratories, governance, curriculum design, and infrastructure. The top priority was setting a mission and vision for governance, followed by formulating committees and academic calendar improvements. Renovation of existing facilities and the establishment of technology were also prioritised. Most departments/institutes focused on staff development programs, collaboration for research and extension, and internal quality systems. Installing a Management Information System (MIS) was identified as a priority for progress monitoring and performance indicators. Despite having a priority that teachers should update their web pages, most teachers are very reluctant to update their web profiles on the university pages. A study found that additional efforts; time; technical inability; and age are the barriers to self-archiving. Assisting with technical and logistical issues can inspire faculties in higher rates of profile updating (Kim, 2010).

In the SA project, departments/institutes received funding from IQAC for their improvement plan. However, the funds were not from the department's initiative; the plan was made for four years. While some departments are progressing in their improvement plans, most are waiting for the grant to start work. Some aspects of the plan can be implemented without funding, such as preparing student handbooks and setting up a grievance committee. Curriculum development has been allocated funds in some departments, but it is unclear if other improvements have been made. Building shared focal labs and establishing an Alumni committee have been initiated, and courses are monitored to ensure full coverage before the examination. Expert

assistance is needed to verify learning outcomes and bring uniformity. The university must take responsibility for establishing shared laboratories. Research has shown that SA can minimise isolation and improve collaborations among colleagues (Ayalon, 1991).

However, several improvements, such as creating a Student Advisor, a grievance committee, remedial learning support, counseling, a monitoring center, and a placement cell, can be done without spending money. According to most interviewees, peer observation of teachers' class performance is incompatible with the concept of university or faculty. SA effectiveness can only be established if accreditation councils rank universities and reward them accordingly. Research has demonstrated the benefits of the SA process and accreditation in introducing organisational changes and improving quality (Pomey et al., 2010). Some participants argued that internal quality assurance had positively impacted by raising awareness of teaching quality issues at institutes. However, they also pointed out that the effects of SA have been primarily centered around increasing bureaucracy rather than bringing about substantive improvements in quality education. These findings are consistence with other studies (Mussawy & Rossman, 2018; Tavares et al., 2017).

Concluding Remarks

The accreditation process starts with an institutional self-assessment against the requirements to be an accredited institution and its stated mission and objectives. It requires collaborative efforts by the UGC, University authority and Ministry of Education to capitalise on the outputs of the SA programme. The effectiveness of the SA program can only be established if accreditation councils rank universities and reward them accordingly. While the SA program has raised awareness of teaching quality issues, the effects have been primarily centered around increasing bureaucracy rather than bringing about substantive improvements in quality education. Quality assurance processes are compound and require a more significant number of stakeholders and, therefore, more challenging to measure (Ivana et al., 2019). Examining impact is a multipart question; consequently, it requires a more elaborated research design and greater time horizons of observation. It is high time to conduct an impact evaluation of the Self-Assessment programme to produce consistent results about outputs, outcomes, and impacts of SA methodically and comprehensively.

Acknowledge

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