



The Worldwide Benchmarking and Quality Assurance Practices in Bangladeshi Universities

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ABSTRACT

This study explores quality assurance practices and international benchmarking in Bangladeshi universities, highlighting key challenges and opportunities. Using a qualitative approach, the research draws insights from 30 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, which were analysed through thematic analysis. The findings reveal essential benchmarking instruments, including curriculum development, faculty training, student engagement, institutional autonomy, governance, and decision-making transparency, which adopt global best practices while considering local realities. Particular attention is given to the role of teaching and research as central pillars of internationally benchmarked quality assurance, with qualified faculty development identified as a critical requirement that needs active government support. This study offers valuable guidance for policymakers, the Ministry of Education, the University Grants Commission, accreditation bodies, university authorities, academicians, and students in strengthening higher education quality. While the study's small sample size limits broad generalization, it fills an important research gap by providing a practical framework for benchmarking implementation. Its originality lies in capturing stakeholder perspectives to enhance sustainable quality assurance mechanisms in higher education institutions.

1. Introduction

Quality higher education is essential for individual growth, economic development, and achieving sustainable development [1]. It plays a critical role in reducing inequality, fostering peace, and developing human capital. As Bangladesh aspires to enhance its position in the global education landscape, ensuring educational quality through international benchmarking and robust quality assurance systems has become increasingly important [2].

Globally, benchmarking in higher education has emerged as a strategic tool for institutional development, focusing on curriculum improvement, faculty development, governance, and learning outcomes [3]. However, in Bangladesh, the integration of internationally recognized benchmarking tools remains limited and underexplored in research [4]. This gap affects educational quality, graduate competitiveness, and global recognition of Bangladeshi universities. Moreover, quality education requires highly qualified faculty members whose recruitment, training, and retention should be ensured with the active support of the

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government. Teaching excellence and a strong research culture are also critical to meeting international standards, as research forms the main basis of quality in higher studies.

This study aims to address this void by examining how Bangladeshi universities can develop and implement internationally benchmarked quality assurance instruments. Using qualitative insights from stakeholders, it identifies best practices, current challenges, and provides policy recommendations for enhancing academic standards in line with global expectations.

Research Objectives:

1. To develop internationally benchmarked instruments for quality assurance in Bangladeshi universities, with a focus on teaching and research.
2. To recommend strategies for their effective implementation.
3. To explore institutional challenges in adopting these tools.

Research Question:

How can Bangladeshi universities construct and apply internationally benchmarked instruments in teaching and research to ensure quality education?

2. Literature Review

The concept of "quality" in higher education is complex and context-dependent. Scholars such as Mishra (2007) argue that while frequently used, the term often lacks clarity [5]. In the academic context, quality is recognized as a multidimensional construct that encompasses institutional goals, learning environments, curriculum standards, and outcomes [6]. Ensuring quality, therefore, requires alignment with both local objectives and international norms [7].

In Bangladesh, efforts toward quality assurance have gained momentum, particularly under the guidance of the University Grants Commission (UGC), which has introduced policies to monitor academic standards, faculty qualifications, and research activities [8]. However, resource limitations and uneven institutional capacities continue to hinder effective implementation [9].

Several barriers persist, including inconsistent data collection, limited awareness of benchmarking, and the need to balance global standards with local relevance [10]. Additionally, there is a shortage of recognized tools that can measure educational quality in a way that reflects both international expectations and national needs [11].

Internationally benchmarked instruments such as accreditation standards and quality assurance frameworks are increasingly being used worldwide to

guide curriculum design, faculty development, and institutional governance. Teaching quality and research capacity are widely recognized as two central benchmarks for assessing higher education performance. In particular, the recruitment of qualified faculty members, supported by government policy and funding, is vital for sustaining effective teaching and producing high-quality research outputs. For Bangladesh, these tools offer a roadmap for improvement, enabling universities to compare practices, share innovations, and collaborate with global peers [12].

Nonetheless, several challenges remain. Outdated curricula, insufficient research output, and limited faculty development hinder progress [13]. Without strengthening the culture of research and continuous faculty training, quality assurance efforts risk falling short of international expectations. Without ongoing evaluation and adaptive strategies, quality assurance efforts risk becoming static and ineffective.

Despite these challenges, international benchmarking presents significant opportunities. It allows institutions to identify gaps, strengthen academic programs, and enhance global visibility [14]. When integrated thoughtfully, benchmarking can drive meaningful change, promote collaboration, and position Bangladeshi universities for sustainable growth.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore how internationally benchmarked quality assurance tools can be developed and implemented in Bangladeshi universities. Qualitative methods are particularly effective in understanding experiences, beliefs, and institutional practices, especially where numerical data alone cannot capture the depth of the issue.

To collect primary data, 30 in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders from several major public universities, including the University of Dhaka, Rajshahi University, Khulna University, Jahangirnagar University, Jagannath University, Chittagong University, and Shahjalal University of Science and Technology. Respondents included former vice-chancellors, faculty members, IQAC directors, deans, department heads, accreditation council members, administrative staff, and students.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face, lasting approximately 40–50 minutes each. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and interview protocols; voice recordings were used with permission; otherwise, notes were taken. The raw data were transcribed, coded, and analysed using thematic analysis. Data coding involved identifying key phrases, grouping them into subcategories, and finally developing broader themes aligned with the research objectives.

The sampling method was non-probability convenience sampling, targeting individuals directly involved in quality assurance processes across institutions. This approach allowed the study to gather deep, contextual insights from experienced voices in the field. However, the reliance on a relatively small and non-random sample limits the generalizability of the findings. While this qualitative approach provides rich insights, future studies may combine it with quantitative surveys or larger datasets to validate and strengthen the significance of the results.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

This research aims to explore the quality assurance activities and international benchmarking practices implemented in higher learning institutions in Bangladesh. By examining the strategies, challenges, and benefits associated with quality assurance and benchmarking, this study aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers, administrators, faculty members, and other stakeholders involved in the higher education sector. The findings shed light on the current state of quality assurance activities and international benchmarking in higher learning institutions in Bangladesh. The findings are based on interviews conducted with teachers, students, and staff from various universities. After rigorously following the data analysis process, this study obtained some unique themes that reflect the study's objective. The emerged themes and subthemes are discussed below:

Theme 1: Quality Assurance Practices

Findings reveal that curriculum development and review are seen as essential to maintaining academic quality and relevance. Participants emphasized aligning course content with industry trends and international standards to ensure graduates are prepared for a dynamic job market [15]. Faculty leaders noted the importance of continuous feedback from stakeholders to keep curricula updated and responsive.

In parallel, faculty training and development emerged as a vital, yet under-resourced, component of quality assurance. Respondents highlighted the need for regular workshops and seminars to improve pedagogical practices and foster innovation in teaching [16]. However, many expressed concern over the limited institutional support for such initiatives in Bangladesh. Several participants further emphasized that government intervention is required to ensure the recruitment of highly qualified faculty members, since teacher expertise directly influences both teaching quality and research output. Student feedback and engagement were also viewed as critical to shaping a student-centred learning environment. Respondents reported using surveys and

focus groups to incorporate student perspectives, enabling curriculum refinement and more effective teaching strategies [17]. One department head emphasized that involving students in QA processes fosters ownership and motivation.

Moreover, participants linked quality assurance efforts to employer confidence and graduate employability. By aligning curricula with industry needs and offering practical training, institutions can produce graduates better equipped for the workforce [18]. Both academic and administrative respondents agreed that rigorous QA processes enhance institutional credibility and student outcomes.

Theme 2: International Benchmarking

The findings underscore that international benchmarking is seen as an essential strategy for improving higher education quality in Bangladesh. Participants emphasized the value of comparing institutional practices such as curriculum design, pedagogy, and quality assurance with those of globally recognized universities to identify gaps and adopt best practices [19].

Several respondents stressed the importance of collaborative partnerships with foreign institutions. Such partnerships enable faculty exchanges, joint research projects, and exposure to diverse educational systems, contributing to a more dynamic and globally competitive academic environment [20]. However, some noted that Bangladeshi universities still lag in forming strong international collaborations.

The adoption of international accreditation standards was also seen as a pathway to institutional credibility, transparency, and continuous improvement. Aligning local quality assurance systems with globally accepted benchmarks helps improve student employability and global recognition. Respondents highlighted that internationally benchmarked instruments should not only measure teaching quality but also encourage the development of research culture, since research is a defining element of higher education excellence.

Theme 3: Institutional Autonomy and Governance

The findings reveal that effective governance and institutional autonomy are essential for ensuring higher education quality in Bangladesh. While regulatory bodies like the University Grants Commission (UGC) set standards and monitor compliance, institutional autonomy enables universities to tailor policies and programs to suit their unique contexts [21]. Respondents affirmed the importance of balancing government oversight with academic independence to foster innovation, accountability, and adaptability [22]. Participants highlighted the role of internal governance structures, noting that clear policies on curriculum

development, faculty evaluation, and student support are key to effective quality assurance. Transparent decision-making and stakeholder participation—including faculty, staff, and students—were seen as vital for promoting ownership and institutional commitment [23]. Moreover, transparency and accountability emerged as recurring themes. Respondents stressed the value of sharing quality assurance data, justifying decisions with evidence, and aligning actions with international benchmarks to build trust and foster a culture of continuous improvement [24].

Theme 4: Challenges in Implementing Quality Assurance Activities

The implementation of quality assurance (QA) in Bangladeshi higher education faces several structural and cultural challenges. A major barrier is insufficient funding, which limits faculty development, infrastructure upgrades, research activities, and technology integration [25]. Respondents stressed that inadequate financial resources hinder institutions' ability to meet international benchmarks, affecting the overall quality of education. Increased government support and strategic partnerships were suggested as solutions. Another significant challenge is resistance to change within institutional cultures. Faculty and staff often prefer traditional practices and are reluctant to adopt new teaching methodologies or QA mechanisms [26]. Interviewees indicated that overcoming this resistance requires targeted communication, training, and incentives to promote acceptance of reform. Additionally, limited awareness and professional development opportunities were cited as obstacles. Respondents called for greater access to capacity-building programs and continuous training to enhance institutional readiness for QA implementation. Building a sustainable culture of quality depends heavily on investment in people and systems. Participants also noted that the lack of structured mechanisms to support faculty research remains a barrier to achieving internationally benchmarked quality assurance.

5. Discussion

This study highlights key aspects of quality assurance (QA) practices in Bangladeshi higher education, drawing on perspectives from faculty, staff, and students. Respondents emphasized the importance of regular curriculum updates aligned with global standards and industry trends to maintain relevance and academic quality. Faculty development programs, including workshops and seminars, were seen as essential for improving teaching practices and promoting pedagogical innovation. However, many stakeholders reiterated that government policy must play a stronger role in ensuring

qualified faculty recruitment and continuous training to sustain quality education.

Student engagement and feedback emerged as another critical area. Respondents noted that involving students in QA processes not only improves instructional quality but also fosters a student-centred environment, encouraging greater motivation and ownership over learning.

In terms of international benchmarking, participants stressed the value of comparing institutional practices with global counterparts. Collaborative partnerships with foreign universities were identified as opportunities for resource sharing, faculty exchange, and the adoption of best practices. The implementation of international accreditation standards was seen as a strategic move to enhance institutional credibility and competitiveness.

With respect to institutional autonomy and governance, interviewees recognized the essential role of regulatory bodies like the UGC in setting standards and ensuring oversight. At the same time, they stressed the need for autonomy in policy development, highlighting the importance of balancing standardization with academic freedom. Inclusive governance, where faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders are engaged in decision-making, was viewed as vital to fostering accountability and long-term quality improvement.

Finally, several challenges were identified. These include limited funding, resistance to change, and restricted access to professional training. Respondents advocated for increased government investment, enhanced capacity-building efforts, and better communication strategies to overcome these barriers.

Overall, the findings underscore that continuous improvement, international collaboration, student involvement, and transparent governance are essential for advancing the quality of higher education in Bangladesh.

6. Implications, Limitations, and Future Research Agenda of the Study

This study provides a comprehensive view of the current state of higher education in Bangladesh, particularly in relation to quality assurance (QA) and international benchmarking. It highlights key instruments—such as curriculum development, faculty training, student engagement, institutional autonomy, and transparent governance as essential components for achieving global education standards.

The findings have significant **implications for policymakers, university administrators, faculty members, students, UGC, BAC, IQAC units, and industry partners**. By identifying gaps between graduate skills and employer expectations, this study offers a framework for aligning higher education

outcomes with international norms. Adopting benchmarked QA practices can enhance institutional performance, improve accreditation processes, and promote the global competitiveness of Bangladeshi universities.

However, the study also identifies a critical gap: the **absence of internationally benchmarked QA tools**. This deficiency limits accurate assessment, weakens global rankings, and reduces graduate competitiveness in the international job market. As a result, the credibility of Bangladeshi higher education remains at risk, and the potential for brain drain increases.

Despite its contributions, the study has **several limitations**:

- The sample size is small and based on **non-probability convenience sampling**, which may affect generalizability.
- The study is limited to selected public universities in Bangladesh, which narrows its scope.
- The **qualitative approach**, while rich in insight, may benefit from triangulation with quantitative data.

For future research:

- **Larger, randomly selected samples** across diverse institutions are recommended.
- Studies may adopt a **quantitative or mixed-method approach** to enhance credibility.
- Comparative studies with other developing countries could offer broader insights into QA practices within varied socio-economic and cultural contexts.

In conclusion, this study lays a foundation for developing robust, internationally benchmarked QA mechanisms in Bangladeshi universities—critical for advancing institutional excellence, empowering communities, and ensuring sustainable educational growth.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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