ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' SATISFACTION AND SERVICE QUALITY GAP FOR PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study is to identify gaps between students' expectations and their perceptions of the services they receive from the private universities of Bangladesh. Three hundred and eighteen students from various private universities in Bangladesh took part in an online survey. From the responses, it is found that a wide range of gaps exists between students' expectations and their perceptions of the service they receive. Therefore, the university administration needs to take adequate measures to bridge the gaps as much as possible. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge in the field of higher education, as well as provides insights to private universities in Bangladesh to produce skilled and well-rounded graduates. Furthermore, the findings will help Bangladeshi private universities produce graduates who can contribute to improving productivity and economic growth in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Quality of education, SERVQUAL, Universities' infrastructure, Gap Analysis, Bangladesh, , Private universities,

INTRODUCTION

Since education is an essential factor for a country's economic growth and for improving its people's skills and abilities, especially young citizens, the Government of Bangladesh is currently striving to improve all levels of the education system. As a visible outcome of improvement in the education system in Bangladesh, every year, the number of Higher School Secondary Certificate (HSC) candidates is more than the total admission capacity of the higher education institutes. Total HSC and equivalent examination graduates were 988,170 in 2019, with a passing rate of 73.93%. On the other hand, the full enrolment capacity in the public university is only 47,457 places for the first year (UGC, 2019). The higher passing rate, compared to the admission capacity in public universities, has occurred since 1971 when only six public universities were available in Bangladesh. Currently, there

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are 147 universities in Bangladesh, comprising 41 public universities, 103 private universities, and three foreign universities. To cater to the increasing demand for tertiary education, many private universities have been established across the country to ensure that students can attend universities without travelling far from their homes. There has been a dramatic increase in the growth of private universities in Bangladesh since 1992, but this growth needed to be commensurate with the development rate of the country, especially in terms of the per capita income of the country, as well as quality assurance in higher education. Generally, expenses in private universities are much higher than in public universities in Bangladesh. Furthermore, their service quality, course design, and costs are questionable to the regulators and consumers (Ashraf et al., 2009). Overall, the higher education institutions, both public and private in Bangladesh, are facing many challenges. The major issues include a lack of efficient and effective teaching and learning methods. It was reported that tertiary graduates from Bangladesh universities had demonstrated weak skills and capabilities (World Bank, 2019).

Furthermore, higher education outputs do not fit the job market in Bangladesh. Therefore, private universities often need help to achieve international quality assurance and academic accreditation. In addition, they cannot compete against other international educational institutions. Generally, Bangladeshi universities have low ranks in the world ranking of higher education institutes (i.e., QS, THES, etc.). This study intends to provide guidelines to enhance the quality of education provided by Bangladeshi private universities or Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by identifying the students' requirements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Exploring Higher Education in Bangladesh
Bangladesh offers two broad streams of courses at the tertiary level of education, through public and private universities. Several universities are also operated and funded by international organizations, including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The Ministry of Education (MoE) ensures that each higher education institution (HEI) is certified and approved by the Government.

Public Universities in Bangladesh
Public universities are established and subsidized by the Government of Bangladesh. These universities are the backbone of higher education in Bangladesh. They are also prestigious universities since their tuition fees and other fees are low and accredited as high-quality educational institutions. The most meritorious students enrol in these universities and are reputed to produce high-quality research outputs. Currently, Bangladesh has a total of 41 public universities, of which the majority are general universities offering various subjects ranging from Language to Science, Technology and Engineering. The growth pattern of public universities is shown in Figure 1. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) report 2018, public universities have a total of 676,623 students and 13,799 teaching staff with a ratio of 49 students to one lecturer, which is higher than the standard level.
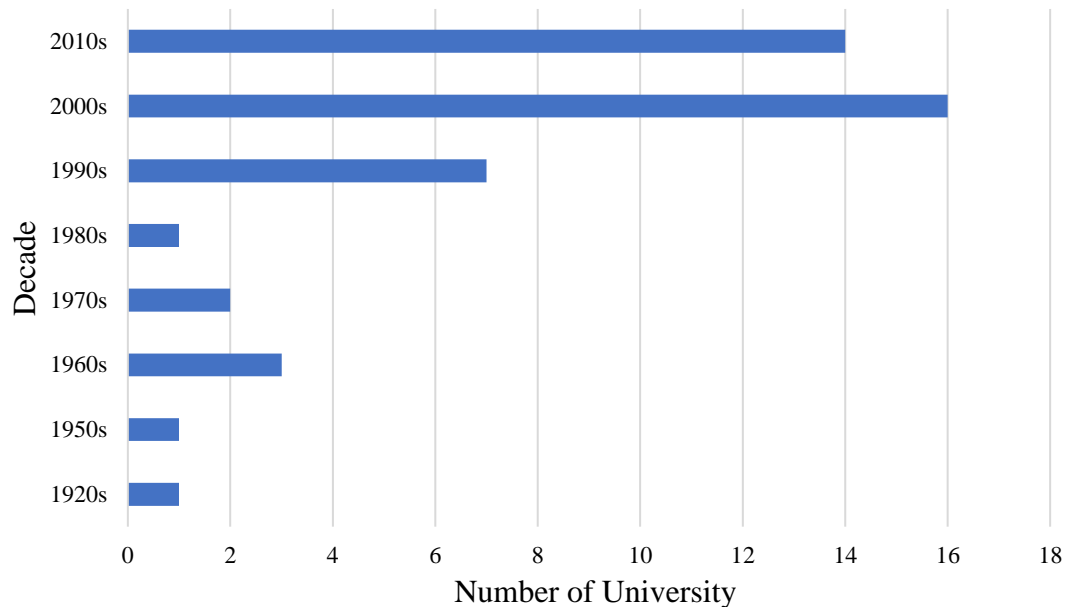
Figure 1: The growth of public universities in Bangladesh in each decade (UGC, 2019)

The establishment of public universities has been in two phases. First phase: the universities that were set up before the year of independence, i.e., 1971. Second phase: those universities which were set up after 1971. There were only seven public universities in Bangladesh before getting its independence. Since then, the population of Bangladesh has increased significantly, which required improvement of facilities, especially in the education sector. Immediately after independence, two universities were established, and another seven universities were later founded in 1999. The reason for a significant increase in new universities was that the Government focused more on developing citizens with skills. Since 2000 and within the last 18 years, 30 new public universities have been approved and established. The Government intends to establish at least one university in every district of Bangladesh to meet the higher education needs of all.

Private Universities in Bangladesh
Besides public universities, private universities also play a significant role in the higher education sector of Bangladesh. According to the University Grant Commission (UGC) report, in 2018, there were 103 approved private universities (UGC, 2019). However, in 2000 there were only 17 private universities, and the number drastically increased to 60 universities in 2010. The growth of private universities is consistently high, where another 43 universities have been approved by the year 2018.

In 2018, the total enrolment of students was 35,1691 in private universities, with 15,575 lecturers (BANBEIS, 2018). Interestingly, the number of female lecturers was higher in private universities (about 29%) than in public universities (about 24%). On the contrary, female students were more prone to enrol in public universities (37.10%) than private universities (27.88%) (BANBEIS, 2018).

Quality Assurance in Private Universities in Bangladesh
The concept of Quality Assurance (QA) is not conclusive and not universally accepted yet. Also, the conceptual framework of QA is not directly related to higher education. Different authors or organizations have defined QA from different points of view. For instance, Vroeijenstijn (1995) defined QA as "*a systemic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and improvement*". This view is shared by Wilger (1997); he states that QA is "*a collective process by which a university ensures that the quality of education process is maintained to the standards it has set itself*".

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural (UNESCO) (2004) defines QA as: "*It is a systemic review of educational programs to ensure that acceptable standard of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained*". On the other hand, the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) (2005) defines QA as: "*All those attitudes, objects, actions and procedures, which through their existence and use, and together with the quality control activities, ensure that appropriate academic standards are being maintained and enhanced in and by each program*".

Vlăsceanu et al. (2007) have extended the concept and have given the following definition: "*QA is an all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions, or programs. As a regulatory mechanism, QA focuses on both accountability and improvement. QA activities depend on the necessary institutional mechanisms preferably sustained by a solid quality culture. Quality management, quality enhancement, quality control, and quality assessment are means through which quality is ensured*".

Therefore, although QA is not conclusive, QA could be applied to ensure the quality of higher education. This calls for comprehensive QA activities in all aspects of the education system, including assessment, supervision, maintenance, infrastructure, and curriculum design.

The UGC of Bangladesh is the highest statutory body for university education to ensure the quality of education. The UGC was established under President's Order No. 10 of 1973. It was effective from 16 December 1973. UGC aims to improve and coordinate university education, monitor and maintain the standard level of university education, assessment and improvement of university education, and advises the Government on various issues related to the universities (UGC, 2008). Thus, UGC is entrusted to maintain quality education in Bangladeshi public and private universities.

The role of UGC is vital for universities. It acts like the central nervous system of a human being. On behalf of the universities of Bangladesh, the UGC deals with the Government, especially with the MoE. Although one of the major responsibilities of the UGC is to receive funds from the Government and disburse them to the universities for their maintenance and development, the UGC, till now, does not deal with the academic affairs of private universities. However, the UGC is authorized to supervise, monitor and regulate the activities of private universities. Regarding the country's education policy, the Government is the ultimate responsible authority, but UGC provides essential materials for framing the higher education policy in Bangladesh. The UGC deals with promoting and developing higher education and research in all fields within the framework of the Government's higher education policy (UGC, 2008). The functions of UGC broadly fall into two categories: Academic and Financial.

Besides the UGC, private universities have their own monitoring system for the quality of education. However, that needs to be standardized. Different universities follow different systems, and most universities do not have the policy to evaluate the quality of education except for a few Grade A private universities. Since private universities are self-financed, the stakeholders only go to the UGC for approval of new curriculum, award of degrees and administrative matters. However, UGC cannot take any action against an allegation of malpractice by private universities because of the Liberal Private University Act 2010 (UGC, 2019).

Quality of Higher Education
Whenever a discussion about the quality of education surfaces, an argument always stands out: to define the term "quality". Regarding this, Pfeffer and Coote (1991) argue that quality is "*a slippery concept"* because it connotes various meanings. In this light, a clear understanding of what quality entails in a different context, including higher education, is imperative.

The word quality comes from the Latin word *qualis*, meaning 'what kind of'. This word has varieties of meanings. For instance, according to Crosby (1979), quality is "conformance to requirements", while Juran and Gryna (1980) defined quality as "fitness for use". Meanwhile, Pfeffer and Coote (1991) express quality as "most of us admire it, many of us want it, and few of us can have it". Another notable definition of quality is by Deming (2000), who focuses on quality in terms of work operation. Here, Deming describes quality as "a predictable degree of uniformity and dependability at low cost and suited to the market" and a "never-ending cycle of continuous improvement".

Students seek knowledge through education via teaching, learning, and assessment to attain the goal set by themselves, their parents and their sponsors. In this regard, education itself is a form of service, and the quality of this service will often equate to the quality of education. Since the word "quality" itself implies different meanings to different people, the quality of education is also defined in many ways. Coombs (1985) defined quality of education as: "*Qualitative dimensions mean more than the quality of education as customarily defined and judged by student learning achievements, in terms of traditional curriculum and standards. Quality also pertains to the relevance of what is taught and*

learned—to how well it fits the present and future needs of the particular learners, given their particular circumstances and prospects. It also refers to significant changes in the educational system, like its inputs; its objectives, curricula and technologies; and socioeconomic, cultural and political environment" (p.368).

Since education is a service, there are two parties involved. They are the service providers and the customers. So while dealing with the quality of education, the term "quality" refers to both parties. Here education providers are the universities, and their point of view on the quality of education, according to Murgatroyd and Morgan (1994), is as follows: "*Quality assurance refers to the determination of standards, appropriate methods and quality requirements by an expert body, accompanied by a process of inspection or evaluation that examines the extent to which practice meets these standards*" (p.216). And customers' point of view on quality of education, according to Murgatroyd and Morgan (1994) is: "*Consumer-driven quality refers to a notion of quality in which those who are to receive a product or service make explicit their expectations for this product or service and quality is defined in terms of meeting or exceeding the expectations of customers*" (p.212).

Quality of Higher Education in Bangladesh
Bangladesh has shown remarkable performance in most indicators of the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) compared to many other countries in the South Asian region. In recent years, Bangladesh has rapidly grown its tertiary education system. According to a report by BANBEIS (2016), 2.84 million students enrolled in higher education in 2015, a hike from 1.60 million students in 2010. Based on the current rate, the number of tertiary education graduates is projected to rise to 20 per cent by 2035 from 11 per cent in 2010 (SABER, 2017). This is reflected in the growth of tertiary education institutions. However, the quality of public or private universities is not satisfactory. This presents a challenge for policymakers as they need to manage those HEIs and work to the best of their interests. Studies also found that in most institutions, the governance structure is often politicized (Monem & Muhammad, 2010). For example, there is evidence that hiring new academic staff and promoting academic staff are prejudiced by the ruling of a political party (Transparency International Bangladesh, 2016). Panday and Jamil (2009) caution that this has a serious negative effect on the quality of higher education.

At present, higher education in Bangladesh is plagued with insufficient facilities and limited resources, which have affected its quality. Many universities lack adequate teaching aids, library and laboratory facilities, and current books and journals and have access to limited research facilities. They also have limited academic resources, a lack of experienced and PhD qualified academic staff, which constrains the quality of higher education in the country (Imtiaz, 2015). Rashid and Rahman (2017) evaluated the service quality of higher education in Bangladesh from the students' point of view. Quantifiable indicators, including the number of students, female participation, new departments, student-lecturer ratio, and the number of new universities, were used to evaluate public universities' service quality and reported that only 54.1% of students were satisfied with their university's service quality. Furthermore, it was found that there was a significant service gap in service dimensions: campus life, assessment system, non-academic facilities, learning, teaching, recognition, internet and library facilities. In this light, recognition and learning are known

as the two most important determinants of customers' overall satisfaction with service quality in HEIs.

The main objective of the present study is to find gaps, if any, between students' expectations and the services they actually receive from the private higher learning institutions of Bangladesh. From the gaps, it will be clear where more efforts need to be engaged in order to improve the quality of education for those institutions. No such study has been carried out in the recent past to address the gaps in students' expectations and their perceptions in the context of Bangladesh's private educational institutions. Hence this study is intended to fill out this research gap.

METHOD

An online questionnaire survey was conducted using Google Forms. Three hundred and eighteen respondents from private higher educational institutions of five divisional cities of Bangladesh, namely Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, and Sylhet, took part in the survey. The sample size of the study is considered adequate, following the guidelines by Sekaran and Bougie (2010). The demographic characteristics of the respondents include gender, age, level of study and divisional city to where the respondents belong. The extended SERVQUAL model was applied to determine the gaps between students' expectations and their perceptions of the SERVQUAL items. The researcher analyzed the data starting with reliability analysis, followed by analyzing students' expectations and perceptions, and lastly, it presented the gaps across all the items.

The study had a total of eight dimensions to look for expectations and perceptions: Lecturer, Curriculum, Teaching & Learning, Library, Laboratory, Classroom, Research, and Campus Life.

SERVQUAL Model
The SERVQUAL model is an empirical model by Parasuraman et al. (1988) to compare service quality performance with customer service quality needs. It is used to perform a gap analysis for an organization's service quality performance against the service quality needs of its customers.

Parasuraman et al. (1985) developed a service quality model after studying four service industries: retail banking, credit card services, repair and maintenance of electrical appliances, and long-distance telephone services. The SERVQUAL model represents service quality as the discrepancy between a customer's expectations of service offering and the customer's perceptions of the service received. What this model strives to measure exactly is the consumer perception of the service quality, which depends on the size of the gap between expected service and perceived service. This service quality measurement is based on how consumers evaluate the service delivery process and the outcome of the service (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Good service quality is considered as the one which meets or exceeds consumers' expectations of the service.

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Demographic Information of the Respondents

Table 1: Demographic information of the respondents

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	165	51.9
Female	153	48.1
Total	318	100.0
Age Group		
18-25 Years	289	90.9
26-30 Years	26	8.2
31 Years and Above	3	.9
Total	318	100.0
Level of Study		
Bachelor	250	78.6
Master	68	21.4
Total	318	100.0
Divisional Location of University		
Dhaka	242	76.1
Khulna	33	10.4
Rajshahi	23	7.2
Sylhet	12	3.8
Chittagong	8	2.5
Total	318	100.0

The demographic information is presented in Table 1. There was a similar number of respondents from both males and females; out of the 318 total respondents, the male stood at 165 with 51.9%, while the female stood at 153 with 48.1%. Regarding the age of respondents, the largest number of respondents belonged to the age group 18-25 years, with 289 out of 318 and equivalent to 90.9% of the total respondents. On the other hand, there were 26 respondents, equal to 8.2% from the 26-30 years age group, while the lowest numbers of respondents were only 3, equivalent to 0.9% from the 31 years and above age group. The reason is relatively straightforward behind these statistics; it was because the study targeted the respondents doing their Bachelor's and Master's degrees, and in general, it is from 18-25 years that most students attend their Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes in Bangladesh. Among the respondents, based on the collected data, 250 out of 318 total respondents, equivalent to 78.6%, belong to the Bachelor's degree category, while the remaining 68, equivalent to 21.4%, belong to the Master's degree category.

The largest number of respondents who participated in this survey came from Dhaka city, with 242 (76.1%) out of 318 total respondents, while the lowest number is from Chittagong city, with eight respondents, equivalent to 2.5%. The second-highest and the second-lowest respondents came from Khulna and Sylhet cities, with 33 (10.4%) and 12 (3.8%), respectively, and lastly, there were only 23 (7.2%) respondents from Rajshahi city of the country.

Reliability Analysis
Malhotra et al. (2017) have defined reliability as the extent to which measurements of a particular test are repeatable. According to Hair et al. (2010), reliability is an evaluation of the degree of consistency between several measurements of variables. According to Cooper and Schindler (2013) and Zikmund et al. (2010), there are four approaches to measuring reliability. They are test-retest, alternate form, split-half, and internal consistency, known as Cronbach's alpha. Internal consistency, or Cronbach's alpha, is a standard method for testing questionnaire reliability (Hilton et al., 2004). The degree to which different items are homogeneous in measuring the same underlying construct is referred to as internal consistency (Cooper & Schindler, 2013).

Cronbach's alpha is utilized to test the internal consistency of 45 statements across eight dimensions (Lecturer, Curriculum, Teaching & Learning, Library, Laboratory, Classroom, Research and Campus Life) from both expectation and perception points of view. The level of consistency is indicated by a Cronbach's alpha score that ranges from 0 to 1. Using a correlation coefficient, Cronbach's alpha score is expressed as a correlation between two data sets. According to the general consensus, ratings of good reliability are greater than or equal to 0.70 (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010; Litwin, 1995). More precisely, George and Mallery (2003, p. 231) state that >0.9 – Excellent, >0.8 – Good, >0.7 – Acceptable, >0.6 – Doubtful, >0.5 – Poor, and <0.5 – Unacceptable. This indicates that the measurement's result must be consistent in a series of samples. The more consistency in a repeated sequence, the more reliable it is. As a result, this study included a reliability analysis utilizing Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha for eight dimensions

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha (Expectations)	Cronbach's Alpha (Perceptions)	Number of Items
Lecturer	0.828	0.944	5
Curriculum	0.878	0.963	7
Teaching & Learning	0.811	0.930	4
Library	0.879	0.953	7
Laboratory	0.869	0.955	5
Classroom	0.861	0.951	5
Research	0.905	0.960	6
Campus Life	0.900	0.933	6

Table 2 shows the individual dimensions of Cronbach's alphas for students' expectations and perceptions of the quality of education in private universities in Bangladesh. The alpha values ranged from 0.811 to 0.905 on the expectations scale and 0.930 to 0.963 for the perceptions, indicating that the reliability of the instrument is acceptable (>0.7). Therefore, all items in the instrument were retained.

Analysis of the Student's Expectations of Service Quality in the Private Universities in Bangladesh

Table 3 shows that most of the respondents had high expectations of the first dimension (Lecturer) in private universities. The number of respondents who thought otherwise was much lower. From the Lecturer dimension, Items number 1(Recruitment of skilled lecturers in the university) and 4 (Having Lecturers who are friendly and cooperative) had maximum expectations from the students. Only 4 (1.3%) and 5 (1.6%) respondents indicated very unimportant, while 251 (78.9%) and 224 (70.4%) indicated Very Important in expressing their views on the two items, respectively. The management of private universities must show a sincere interest in addressing these issues. Likewise, many of the respondents also indicated very important for the remaining items, "Efficient teaching and learning method applied in university", "Having lecturers who are dedicated to quality teaching", and "Having lecturers with good academic qualifications". For this reason, it shows that the school management of the private universities in the country must give great consideration to employing qualified lecturers to teach in their respective institutions. Similar observations are made for all the items of the remaining seven dimensions.

Gap Analysis

The gap is the difference between the means of expectations and perceptions of the students. The gap score analysis is to enable the researchers to find out how the student perceives the quality of the private universities in Bangladesh and try to identify what dimensions of service quality they are satisfied with. As mentioned before, altogether 318 respondents participated in the data collection through the extended SERVQUAL questionnaire survey. This service quality gap is calculated by subtracting respondents' expectations from their perceptions (P-E). The last column of Table 3 shows the gap for all the items.

Table 3: Mean of items for students' expectations and perceptions

Dimension	Items	Mean (Expectation)	Mean (Perception)	Gap (P-E)
Lecturer	Recruitment of skilled lecturers in the university	4.69	3.45	-1.24
	Having lecturers with good academic qualifications.	4.39	3.37	-1.02
	Efficient teaching and learning methods applied in university.	4.57	3.34	-1.23
	Having Lecturers who are friendly and cooperative.	4.59	3.41	-1.18

	Having lecturers who are dedicated to quality teaching.	4.53	3.40	-1.13
Curriculum	Having an international standard curriculum in my university.	4.54	3.25	-1.29
	Having up-to-date course curriculum and contents in my university.	4.53	3.27	-1.26
	Recognition of university degree.	4.56	3.34	-1.22
	Suitability of university curriculum for the job market.	4.58	3.28	-1.3
	The University curriculum is effective in developing ICT & communication skills,	4.46	3.22	-1.24
	The University curriculum addresses the program objectives and learning outcomes.	4.44	3.22	-1.22
	The University curriculum is effective in developing analytical and problem-solving skills.	4.45	3.25	-1.2
Teaching and Learning	Use of the technological device in teaching and learning	4.50	3.27	-1.23
	Applications of diverse teaching and learning methods.	4.39	3.29	-1.1
	Providing additional practical ideas from real-life situations apart from the textbook.	4.52	3.25	-1.27
	Inspiring students to learn on their own and to achieve the learning outcome.	4.52	3.29	-1.23
Library	Excellent library facility at my university	4.46	3.20	-1.26
	Availability of enough books, journals, and reports to meet student's needs in the university library.	4.51	3.17	-1.34
	Availability of virtual access and online journals in the university library.	4.45	3.08	-1.37
	Availability of audio-visual facilities in the university library	4.38	3.06	-1.32

	Availability of software to search books.	4.46	3.07	-1.39
	Availability of congenial reading environment.	4.45	3.21	-1.24
	Availability of internet facilities with sufficient bandwidth.	4.53	3.98	-0.55
Laboratory	Having an excellent lab facility in the university.	4.56	3.16	-1.4
	Having adequate, efficient, and supportive staff in the laboratories.	4.57	3.19	-1.38
	Having a good number of laboratories.	4.50	3.15	-1.35
	Having well-spaced with relevant equipment and properly maintained laboratories.	4.53	3.15	-1.38
	Having enough chemicals for experiments and practical purposes.	4.53	3.17	-1.36
Classroom	Having excellent classroom facilities in the university.	4.56	3.28	-1.28
	Having a good number of well-spaced classrooms.	4.55	3.26	-1.29
	Having well equipped and well-maintained classroom.	4.48	3.25	-1.23
	Having all classrooms equipped with multimedia.	4.48	3.22	-1.26
	Having classroom arrangements following international standards.	4.47	3.14	-1.33
Research	Having research facilities at my university	4.53	3.08	-1.45
	Having a research culture at my university	4.54	3.06	-1.48
	Availability of research facility for students	4.51	3.06	-1.45
	Availability of research-based Master's program	4.50	3.08	-1.42
	Having research output of university published in recognized journals	4.56	3.06	-1.55
	Lecturers are always eager to hunt for research funds for engagement in research scholarship and development	4.48	3.14	-1.34

Campus Life	Having enough games facilities in my university	4.45	3.05	-1.45
	Having a playground facility at the university	4.44	2.97	-1.47
	Having enough indoor games facility.	4.46	3.01	-1.45
	Having a separate room for club activities	4.46	3.08	-1.38
	Having an excellent medical facility on campus.	4.47	3.08	-1.39
	Having a prayer room on campus	4.56	3.13	-1.43

Table 4 shows the mean scores of the expectations and perceptions of the students on the quality of education provided by the public universities in Bangladesh. The mean scores of the items ranged from 4.38 to 4.69 for expectations and 2.97 to 3.45 for perceptions. The table shows gap exists in all the dimensions of service quality for education provided by the private universities in Bangladesh.

Table 4: Dimension-wise gap between expectations and perceptions

Categories	Means (Expectations)	Means (Perceptions)	Gap (P-E)	Number of Items
Lecturer	4.55	3.39	-1.16	5
Curriculum	4.50	3.26	-1.24	7
Teaching & Learning	4.48	3.27	-1.21	4
Library	4.45	3.11	-1.34	7
Laboratory	4.53	3.16	-1.37	5
Classroom	4.50	3.23	-1.27	5
Research	4.52	3.08	-1.44	6
Campus Life	4.47	3.05	-1.42	6
All 8 Dimensions	**4.50**	**3.19**	**-1.31**	**45**

Since the gap (-1.31) between the student's expectations and perceptions is significant, it is reasonable to take further initiatives to improve the quality of education provided by the private universities in Bangladesh.

DISCUSSION

Private higher educational institutes have emerged as an exquisite substitute for the traditional academic system worldwide in the last two decades. At the same time, it has gained significant popularity and acceptance in developed and many developing countries. Experiencing the global success of private higher education institutes, academic experts anticipate that this unique educational system will gradually control more than 50% of the population in Muslim-dominated countries within the next decade (Ahmad, 2004).

However, the private higher education institutes sector has been facing enormous challenges in the past two decades, including an increase in competition, procedural challenges, sceptical policy and natural business atmosphere, introduction of modern technologies and an ever-changing service delivery system (Al-Eisa & Alhemoud, 2009). These challenges have forced academic institutions to shift their focus from price to service quality.

The private higher education institutes system possesses more potential than the public education system; it places more stress on ensuring well-trained and productive students along with quality services to sustain the satisfaction of the clients and customers. In addition, the graduate of private higher education institutes, including contemporary institutions, have improved significantly in recent years. However, the skill development process is a complicated task as it needs to include various steps and collect data and information from other divisions and wings of an institution (Ahmed, 2011).

In this research, the researcher finds significant gaps between expectations and their perceptions while analyzing data. In fact, considering all the items together, the gap is -1.31. This may be considered as a significant gap signalling the educational administrators of Bangladesh private universities to take prompt and necessary actions to narrow down the gaps. The findings are supported by other researchers (Ahmad & Hassan, 2007).

According to Sagnier and Nathan (2013), to remain competitive private higher education institutes must update their services and have strong and distinctive identities to ensure quality services. Meanwhile, Balachandran (2005) believes that private higher education institutes must attain excellent standards in terms of their products and services. The officials and staff of an institution should be committed and sincere to ensure students' satisfaction. At the same time, they must adopt new innovative strategies, which will carry them to a new height.

CONCLUSION

Customers play an important role in sustaining and maintaining organizations in a competitive environment. Customers have their intended views, and they have their requirements. To maximize customer satisfaction, organizations are expected to pay adequate attention to fulfilling their expectations/requirements. In this study, the students of various private universities in Bangladesh provided their level of expectations on 45 items belonging to eight dimensions of educational service quality. The respondents also provided their level of satisfaction with the same items of those eight dimensions. Significant gaps have been identified between students' expectations and their level of perception. The management team within private higher education institutes is expected to take the findings of this research in its future redesigning exercise of the private higher education institute's services. This may push them one step forward to their vision to provide excellent private higher education institutes services to students. The research findings are equally useful to other similar institutions for efficient and effective operation.

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