

Rewiring the classroom

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Rishov Aditya

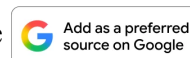


Illustration: Adrin Sarwar

Private universities have been at the centre of discussion time and time again for various reasons. One of its peak moments was when it stood against the government for imposing 15% income tax on these private institutes back in 2015. It was also one of the highlights during the July Uprising when it helped the movement stay on its course while all hope seemed lost. This leads one to wonder, beneath all of this, what are these universities offering?

The inception, advancements, and accommodations

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Private universities began their journey back in 1992 under a government act which was last updated in 2010. In this long journey, these institutes have been able to offer a space for students to hold back from the public university races, allowing them to pursue a quality education within the boundaries of their homeland. Over the years, these institutes have made significant progress in enhancing the educational environment, co-curricular activities, and opportunities available to students from diverse backgrounds.

Similarly, East West University (EWU) was established to champion the cause of “social progress,” according to Professor Dr Mohammad Farashuddin, the founding Vice-Chancellor and incumbent Chairperson of the Board of Trustees. He explains, “We wanted the students to get a tertiary education of the best Bangladeshi standard, if not world standard, at a reasonable cost.”

During the pandemic, private universities were able to shift online smoothly due to integrating digital components into their teaching curriculum. Professor Dr Shamsad Mortuza, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), supported this claim, saying, “We didn't lose a single second because we had that kind of preparedness since we started as a liberal arts model modelled after North America. So we had that educational background.” Professor Mortuza further mentions how ULAB is attempting to integrate AI into its classrooms

“NSU Startups Next is an entrepreneurial incubation center. Students gain internship opportunities here and grow their businesses under the guidance of industry professionals. But improving the sports facilities would also be helpful, as it provides a productive form of entertainment.”

NUMAIRA TABASSUM BHUIYAN, THIRD YEAR STUDENT, BBA, NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY

Professor Dr M. Tamim, the vice-chancellor of Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), too believes in the importance of integrating smart technology within the classroom to enhance the learning opportunities for students. He shares, “The 21st century is driven by connectivity, which is reflected in our campus. We have digital classrooms, facilities for online learning, and smart technology.” IUB is also one of the first universities in Bangladesh to introduce Wi-Fi 7, the latest internet technology. Professor Farashuddin, while identifying the advantages of audiovisual learning, warns that dependency on these methods may

cause students to rely on rote memorisation, especially for students pursuing disciplines within non-science fields. However, as these universities have been rising in ranks, a significant concern has emerged regarding the accommodation of the large influx of students

“The greenery around our campus offers a fresh relief amidst hectic schedules. This way, my university also helps shape students’ behavior, which provides them with a competitive edge in both the global world and professional work environments today.”

NUREN MAHPARA, FINAL-YEAR STUDENT, BIOTECHNOLOGY, BRAC UNIVERSITY



Photo: BGMEA University of Fashion and Technology (BUFT)

According to the Bangladesh Education Statistics of 2021, the number of intakes had increased from 120,276 to 328,689 simply in a span of two years. This has led to many universities, including EWU, to shift to permanent campuses and even extend them further to allow students the opportunity to pursue their education in a more welcoming environment and tackle any feelings of congestion.

Beneficial facilities and research opportunities

An important aspect of university life for any student is the library and its offered facilities. According to Professor Mortuza, ULAB is currently collaborating with BDREN to update its library services and further strengthen its initiative of smart classrooms. EWU, too, prides itself on its library facilities, says Professor Farashuddin.

He concurs, “We wanted an excellent library, including internet facilities, so that the students do not have to buy books.” But in today’s time, not just the curriculum but what matters as well is the environment for a student to thrive in their studies. The architecture is important in terms of providing a piece of mind for the students. Nuren Mahpara, a senior at BRAC University, finds that the greenery around her campus offers a fresh relief amidst the hectic schedules. Professor Dr M. Rezwan Khan, Professor Emeritus of EEE and the Director of the Institute for Advanced Research (IAR) at the United International University (UIU), also resonates with the importance of a social environment, stating, “Sustainability is important, and often nature is a good teacher.”

These institutes are also prioritising health and mental well-being to ensure that students are in the best shape and mind. Numaira Bhuiyan, a student from North South University's (NSU) BBA department, shares that besides offering a gym, the authorities provide healthy snacks to purchase, making sure their students’ health can remain uncompromised



Photo: Stamford University

She further states, “We have counselling units that provide students with very good support.” A key concern for these universities is the industry gap. Al Amin John, a student from IUB, credits such institutes for helping to foster an entrepreneurial spirit. He highlights, “IUB promotes collaboration with experts and organisations through seminars and networking, allowing us to turn ideas into real businesses.” This claim is further supported by Professor Tamim, who mentions such initiatives taken, such as Innovation to Impact, IUB360, and more. An effective way to achieve this is through a strong research programme. Professor Khan identifies that research is an expensive lane, leading to private universities struggling to compete internationally. He affirms, “First, it’s the quality of teaching and learning, and second, the quality of research. They must go hand in hand.”

Beyond a degree

„ **“IUB provides a robust student life experience through various club initiatives along with recreational facilities, including strong healthcare support.”**

AL AMIN JOHN, THIRD YEAR STUDENT, BBA INDEPENDENT UNIVERSITY, BANGLADESH

These institutes have offered an alternative to the traditional education offered by the public universities. But as Professor Khan warns, “They still have big scope for improvement.” Despite the challenges, their advancement and growth are on a positive trajectory. The overall cohesion between the environment, the curriculum, and philosophies perpetuated by these institutes is instilling capabilities in students firmly. Nuren believes, “These institutes help shape students’ behaviour, which provides them with a competitive edge in the global world and professional work.” As these universities are further delving into research and industry-focused learning through the usage of smart teaching and exceptional facilities, it is helping bridge the gap that may have seemed impossible before.