

# Higher Education in Sylhet Division of Bangladesh: Performance of Private Universities

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## Abstract

Higher education in Bangladesh has its roots in the British colonial period, and since the country's liberation in 1971, the government has placed significant emphasis on developing the education sector. This study aims to identify the structure, acts, laws, and commissions governing higher education in Bangladesh, with a particular focus on the Sylhet division. The study also assesses the performance of private universities within this division. Secondary data were gathered from various articles, websites, and relevant documents, while specific information regarding Leading University was obtained from the office of the Controller of Examinations. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data. The findings indicate that the higher education sector in Bangladesh has undergone significant transformation, particularly following the implementation of the Private University Act of 1992. Among the 158 universities nationwide, only 10 are located in the Sylhet division, and among the 114 medical colleges, only 7 are situated in this region. Within Sylhet's four districts, the Sylhet district houses the majority of higher education institutions, while the Moulvibazar district has the fewest. The private universities in the Sylhet division have shown strong performance in terms of infrastructure, physical facilities, and teacher-student ratios, with Leading University identified as the top performer. However, this study primarily focuses on the opportunities available in higher education in the Sylhet division, and does not assess the quality of education. Future research could explore this aspect further.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Performance, Private Universities, Regulations, Structure, Sylhet Division



By Authors

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## Introduction

Higher Education (HE), also known as tertiary education, encompasses the full range of post-secondary education pursued after the completion of 12 years of schooling<sup>1</sup>. The history of

<sup>1</sup> Mahfuzul Hoque Chowdhury, Mir Mohammed Nurul Absar, and Syed Manzur Quader, "Challenges and Developments in the Higher Education System of Bangladesh," *Global Education Systems* (Springer Singapore, 2020), [http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3309-5\\_57-1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3309-5_57-1); M. Amin Abdullah, "Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact and Prospects for the World Community," *Al-Jami'ah* (2017); Shoukot Ali et al.,

HE in the Bengal region dates back to the mid-19th century, with the establishment of Calcutta University and several degree-awarding colleges, such as Dhaka College, Chittagong College, Eden Girls' College, Rajshahi College, Murari Chand College, and Comilla Victoria College, aimed at providing equitable access to higher education for students in East Bengal. In 1921, the British Government established the University of Dhaka, which later played a central role in higher education in East Pakistan following the partition of British India in 1947. Subsequently, five more universities were established before Bangladesh's independence in 1971: Rajshahi University (1953), Bangladesh Agricultural University (1961), Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (1962), Chittagong University (1966), and Jahangirnagar University (1970) <sup>2</sup>.

Historically, higher education in Bangladesh was considered a luxury in a society marked by widespread illiteracy <sup>3</sup>. However, after the country's liberation in 1971, the education sector was identified as a top priority by the government <sup>4</sup>. Article 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh declared education a fundamental right for all citizens. Since then, the government has endeavored to use education as a tool for national development by initiating and implementing various education commissions and policies to address contemporary educational challenges <sup>5</sup>.

In line with recommendations from these commissions and policies, the government permitted the establishment of private educational institutions alongside public ones, leading to the creation of 107 private universities in the last three decades <sup>6</sup>. The rapid expansion of universities in Bangladesh, in terms of both size and infrastructure, has been largely driven by government investments <sup>7</sup>. Despite this growth, the current level of budgetary allocation for the education sector remains insufficient, and allocations have been inconsistent (Rahman et al., 2016). Furthermore, there is a consensus among academics, education researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders that the quality of higher education in Bangladesh is facing significant challenges and has been steadily deteriorating <sup>8</sup>.

To address these concerns and ensure the quality of higher education, the government introduced the Private University Act in the early 1990s, which allowed for the establishment of

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“Pursuing Higher Education: Adaptation Challenges and Coping Strategies of Rural Students at Urban Universities in Bangladesh,” *Tertiary Education and Management* 27, no. 2 (2021): 91–106, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11233-021-09067-3>.

<sup>2</sup> Chowdhury, Absar, and Quader, “Challenges and Developments in the Higher Education System of Bangladesh.”

<sup>3</sup> Mobasser Monem and Hasan Muhammad Baniamin, “Higher Education in Bangladesh: Status, Issues and Prospects,” *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences* 30, no. 2 (2010): 293–305.

<sup>4</sup> Iqbal Ahmed Chowdhury et al., “Internal Migration and Socio-Economic Status of Migrants: A Study in Sylhet City, Bangladesh,” *American Journal of Human Ecology* 1, no. 4 (2012): 123–133.

<sup>5</sup> Md MUHIBBULLAH, Abdullah Al MAMUN, and Rafia AFROZ, “Quality of Higher Education: Improving the Well-Being through Humanizing Digital Entrepreneurship Program,” *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business* 8, no. 2 (2021): 1201–1213; Mustari Bosra, “The Contribution of Local Muslim Scholars to the Development of Indonesia’s Education,” *Society* (2022); Ali et al., “Pursuing Higher Education: Adaptation Challenges and Coping Strategies of Rural Students at Urban Universities in Bangladesh.”

<sup>6</sup> et al., “Assessing Students’ Satisfaction in Public Universities in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study,” *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business* 7, no. 8 (2020): 323–332, <http://dx.doi.org/10.13106/jafeb.2020.vol7.no8.323>.

<sup>7</sup> Chowdhury et al., “Internal Migration and Socio-Economic Status of Migrants: A Study in Sylhet City, Bangladesh.”

<sup>8</sup> Ali et al., “Pursuing Higher Education: Adaptation Challenges and Coping Strategies of Rural Students at Urban Universities in Bangladesh.”

private universities <sup>9</sup>. In the Sylhet division, the Leading University was established by the renowned philanthropist Danobir Dr. Syed Ragib as the first private university in the region. Sylhet division, located in the northeastern corner of Bangladesh, comprises four districts—Sylhet, Habiganj, Moulvibazar, and Sunamganj—covering a total area of approximately 12,596 square kilometers and home to about nine million people. The division accounts for 8.5% of Bangladesh's total land area and 6.4% of its population. While 23% of the national population resides in urban areas, the figure is only 12.5% in Sylhet. Educationally, Sylhet is the lowest-performing division, with a literacy rate of 40.7% for individuals aged 7 years and older, compared to the national average of 48.5%. Adult literacy in Sylhet stands at 44.4%, below the national average of 52.1%, and other educational indicators also show that Sylhet lags behind the rest of the country <sup>10</sup>.

Given this context, the present study aims to identify the structure, acts, laws, commissions, and investment trends in higher education in Bangladesh; to compare higher education opportunities in the Sylhet division with the national landscape; and to assess the performance of private universities in Sylhet. This descriptive study utilizes secondary data from the websites of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Law and Justice, the Ministry of Finance, and the University Grants Commission (UGC), as well as reports from the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS). Data specific to private universities in Sylhet were collected in a structured format and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study is organized into five sections: the structure of higher education in Bangladesh, relevant acts, laws, and commissions, investment trends in higher education, the state of higher education in the Sylhet division, and an assessment of the performance of Leading University in Sylhet. These findings are discussed in detail in the following sections.

## Method

The present study employed a descriptive research design to explore the structure, regulations, investment trends, and performance of higher education (HE) institutions, with a particular focus on private universities in the Sylhet division of Bangladesh. The study utilized secondary data sources to achieve its objectives, relying on a comprehensive review of relevant documents, reports, and online content.

## Data Collection

Secondary data were collected from various authoritative sources to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings. The following data sources were utilized:

1. Higher Education Structure, Acts, and Laws: Information regarding the structure, acts, laws, and commissions related to higher education in Bangladesh was obtained from the official websites of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Law and Justice,

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<sup>9</sup> Gazi Mahabubul Alam and Morsheda Parvin, "Quality of HE in Private Universities of Bangladesh: The Four Fundamental Perspectives," *International Journal of Higher Education* 6, no. 4 (2017): 38, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v6n4p38>.

<sup>10</sup> Education Watch, 2009-2010

Bangladesh. These sources provided insights into the regulatory framework governing higher education in the country.

2. **Investment Trends in Higher Education:** Data on investments in higher education were sourced from the Ministry of Finance's website and the annual reports of the University Grants Commission (UGC). These documents provided detailed information on budget allocations, financial trends, and investment priorities in the higher education sector.
3. **Higher Education Scenario in Sylhet Division:** To explore the state of higher education in the Sylhet division, data were gathered from the Ministry of Education's website, the UGC's website, and various reports published by the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS). These sources offered a comprehensive overview of the availability and distribution of educational institutions in the Sylhet division.
4. **Performance of Private Universities in Sylhet Division:** Specific information regarding the performance of private universities in Sylhet was collected through structured data requests from the universities themselves, as well as from the Annual Report of UGC, 2019. The data collected included metrics related to infrastructure, physical facilities, teacher-student ratios, and other relevant performance indicators.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were systematically organized and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Tabular and graphical methods were employed to present the data clearly and effectively. The analysis focused on identifying patterns, trends, and disparities in higher education within the Sylhet division compared to the national context. The performance of private universities was assessed by comparing key indicators across institutions within the division.

### **Data Interpretation**

The interpretation of the data was conducted using the author's personal judgment, informed by the existing literature and the context of higher education in Bangladesh. The study's findings were presented in a structured format, with the discussion divided into five sections: the structure of higher education in Bangladesh, relevant acts, laws, and commissions, investment trends in higher education, the state of higher education in the Sylhet division, and the performance of Leading University in Sylhet.

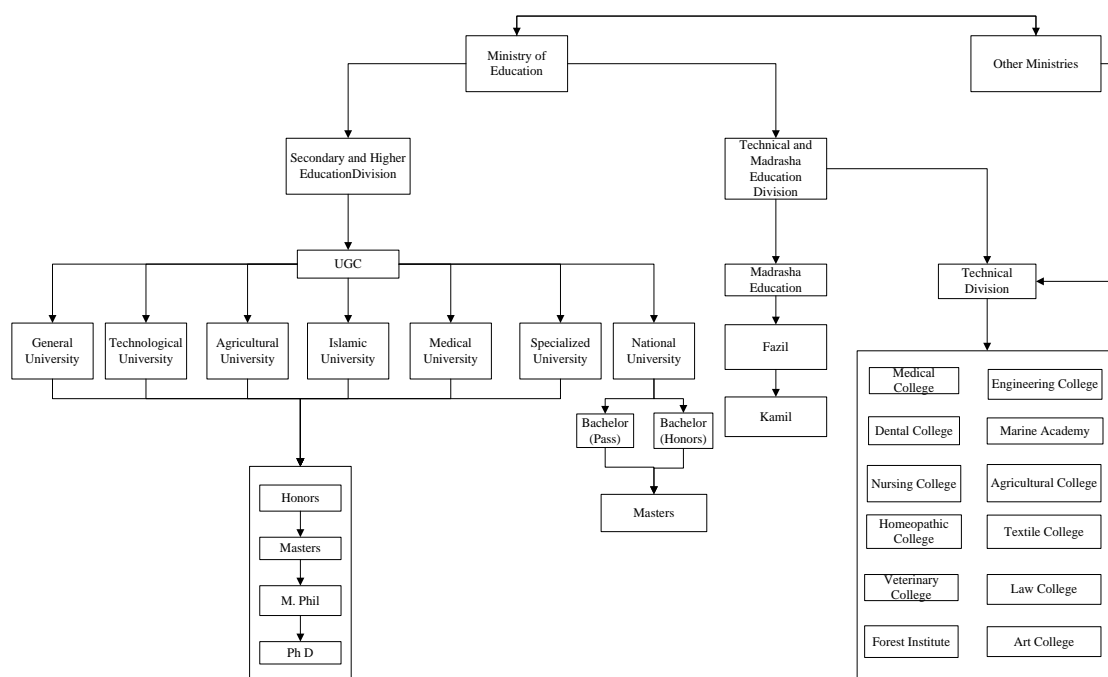
The methodological approach adopted in this study allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the higher education landscape in the Sylhet division, providing valuable insights into the performance of private universities in the region. The findings are intended to inform policymakers, educators, and stakeholders about the current state of higher education and the opportunities and challenges faced by institutions in this area.

## **Research Results and Discussion**

## Higher Education Structure in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's higher education system is modeled after the British education system but has undergone several modifications through various government initiatives and committees formed post-independence. The education system is structured into three phases: primary, secondary, and higher education, with higher education commencing after the completion of higher secondary or equivalent qualifications. The structure of tertiary education in Bangladesh is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Structure of Tertiary Education in Bangladesh



Source: Author, based on the information of the Ministry of Education

The figure illustrates that the Ministry of Education manages tertiary education through the Secondary and Higher Education Division (SHED) and the Technical and Madrasah Education Division (TMED). SHED administers general universities through the University Grants Commission (UGC), which oversees institutions offering degrees in fields such as technology, agriculture, medicine, and specialized areas. The National University, another key player, offers Bachelor's (Pass), Bachelor's (Honors), and Master's degrees through affiliated government and private colleges. TMED, on the other hand, supervises various professional and technical education institutions, including medical, dental, engineering, and veterinary colleges, in collaboration with other relevant ministries.

## Higher Education Commissions and Regulations in Bangladesh

Under Article 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh, education is recognized as a fundamental right. This article mandates the state to provide free and compulsory education to all children, establish a mass-oriented education system, and eradicate illiteracy. To ensure quality and access to higher education, the government has introduced several Acts, Laws, and Commissions. The Bangladesh Ordinance (Adaptation of Universities) of 1972 marked the first significant

legislative effort to restructure higher education, followed by the establishment of the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1973 through the University Grants Commission Act. The UGC was tasked with assessing educational needs, developing university plans, determining financial requirements, and overseeing university programs.

The Private University Act of 1992, later replaced by the Private University Act of 2010, opened new avenues for private higher education institutions to meet the growing demand for education. Additionally, the Bangladesh Accreditation Council Act of 2017 was enacted to ensure quality assurance in higher education by accrediting public and private institutions and their academic programs. The Strategic Plan for Higher Education in Bangladesh (2018-2030) was introduced to align the nation's higher education goals with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### Government Expenditure on Education in Bangladesh

Since its independence, Bangladesh has consistently prioritized the education sector, with notable budgetary allocations for its development. The World Education Forum 2015, held in Incheon, Korea, called for increased public spending on education globally, setting an agenda for 2030. Table 1 summarizes the government's expenditure on education in Bangladesh over recent years.

Table 1: Education Expenditure in Bangladesh

Financial Year	National Budget (in Crore TK)	Education Budget (in Crore TK)	Education Budget to National Budget (%)	University Budget (in Crore TK)	University Budget to Education Budget (%)	University Budget to National Budget (%)
2009-2010	110524.23	11566.46	10.46	860.46	7.44%	0.78%
2010-2011	130012.13	13399.44	10.30	1102.24	8.22%	0.84%
2011-2012	161212.93	18378.58	11.40	1192.47	6.48%	0.73%
2012-2013	189325.70	21016.27	11.10	1248.57	5.94%	0.65%
2013-2014	216221.95	26339.70	12.18	1559.64	5.92%	0.72%
2014-2015	239667.73	28628.04	11.94	1760.89	6.15%	0.73%
2015-2016	264564.67	37114.60	14.02	2480.07	6.68%	0.94%
2016-2017	317171.15	39507.82	12.45	3172.17	8.03%	1.00%
2017-2018	371495.34	41623.60	11.20	3535.87	8.49%	0.95%
2018-2019	442541.31	46389.48	10.48	4054.49	8.74%	0.92%

Source: Annual Report UGC-2019 (2020)

The table 1 shows a consistent increase in the education budget, though the percentage allocation relative to the national budget varies annually. The university budget as a percentage of the national budget has shown a slight decline in recent years, emphasizing the need for more consistent and targeted investment in higher education.

## The Scenario of Higher Education in Sylhet Division

The Sylhet division has a rich history in higher education, with the establishment of Murari Chand (MC) College in 1892, which played a pioneering role in the region. The development of higher education in Sylhet continued with the establishment of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) in 1986, the first public university in the region. Over time, several private universities have also been established under the Private University Act, 1992, contributing to the educational landscape of Sylhet. Table 2 provides an overview of the universities in Sylhet division.

Table 2: Universities in Sylhet Division

Name of the University	District	Type	Year of Establishment
Shahjalal University of Science & Technology	Sylhet	Public	1986
Leading University	Sylhet	Private	2001
Sylhet International University	Sylhet	Private	2001
Metropolitan University	Sylhet	Private	2003
Sylhet Agricultural University	Sylhet	Public	2006
North East University Bangladesh	Sylhet	Private	2012
Sylhet Medical University	Sylhet	Public	2018
Habiganj Agricultural University	Habiganj	Public	2020
Sunamganj Science and Technology University	Sunamganj	Public	2020
R.T.M Al-Kobir Technical University	Sylhet	Private	2020

*Source: UGC, 2021*

Sylhet division hosts a total of 10 universities, with the majority concentrated in Sylhet district. Notably, the division lacks representation in Moulvibazar district, reflecting a geographic disparity in higher education access. Despite having a historical foundation in education, the Sylhet division's share of higher education institutions remains low relative to its population.

## Performance of Private Universities in Sylhet

The performance of private universities in Sylhet is evaluated based on several criteria, including physical and academic infrastructure, faculty and student ratios, research output, and financial sustainability. Table 7 provides a summary of the physical and academic infrastructure of these universities.

Table 7: Physical & Academic Infrastructure

Particulars (In 2019)	Leading University (LU)	Sylhet International University (SIU)	Metropolitan University (MU)	North East University (NEUB)
Land area (In Acres)	6.25	2.01	7.4091	3.4773
Campus	Full operation in own campus	Operation in own campus but with legal issues	Partially operated in own campus	Operated in rented campus
Faculty (Schools)	4	4	4	4
Departments	10	5	6	8
Programs	15	16	15	18
Shahid Minar	Yes	No	No	No

*Source: University Grants Commission Annual Report- 2019 (2020)*

Leading University (LU) stands out with robust physical and academic infrastructure, full campus operation, and a diverse range of programs. In comparison, other universities face challenges, such as partial campus operation and fewer departments.

## Faculty and Student Information

Table 8: Teachers-Students Related Information

Particulars (In 2019)	Leading University (LU)	Sylhet International University (SIU)	Metropolitan University (MU)	North East University (NEUB)
Number of Full-time Teachers	109	39	99	41
Part-time Teachers	32	5	10	20
Total Teachers	141	44	109	61
Number of PhD Holders	11	5	14	7
Number of Professors	12	7	10	8
Teacher-Student Ratio	1:24	1:20	1:28	1:17
Total Students	3400	890	1863	1065
Female Students	1311	226	837	377

*Source: University Grants Commission Annual Report- 2019 (2020)*

Leading University (LU) again leads with the highest number of full-time faculty, students, and a balanced teacher-student ratio, making it the most favorable environment for academic success.

## Research and Library Resources

Table 9: Research and Library

Particulars (In 2019)	Leading University (LU)	Sylhet International University (SIU)	Metropolitan University (MU)	North East University (NEUB)
Total Expenditure on Research	1034460.00	2062680.00	3142322.00	420897.00
Number of Research Projects	8	-	2	-
Peer-reviewed Articles	33	-	39	1
Total Library Collection	15908	7039	8781	2522
Collection Added in 2019	639	-	134	2
E-Library and Journal Access	Yes	Not found	Not found	Not found

*Source: University Grants Commission Annual Report- 2019 (2020)*

Although LU's research expenditure is lower than other universities, its productivity in terms of research projects and publications, along with superior library resources, positions it as a leader in fostering an academic environment conducive to research.

## Revenue and Expenditure

Table 12: Revenue and Expenditure

Particulars (In 2019)	Leading University (LU)	Sylhet International University (SIU)	Metropolitan University (MU)	North East University (NEUB)
Annual Revenue (In Lacs TK)	3239.92	621.82	2116.61	558.86
Annual Expenditure (In Lacs TK)	3204.80	842.20	2782.24	565.60
Expense Per Student (In TK)	80417.00	55759.00	75984.00	44707.87
Financial Statement Submitted	Yes	No	Yes	No

*Source: University Grants Commission Annual Report- 2019 (2020)*

LU demonstrates strong financial management, with a high expense per student and timely submission of financial statements to the UGC, indicating its operational transparency and sustainability.

## Discussion

Higher education (HE) in Bangladesh operates within a multifaceted framework, characterized by three primary streams: the general education system, which encompasses pure and applied sciences, arts, business, and social sciences; the Madrasha education system; and the technological education system, which includes specialized disciplines such as agriculture, engineering, medicine, textile, and information and communication technology (ICT) (MoE, 2021). This structure mirrors the broader South Asian context, where HE is similarly governed by institutions such as University Grants Commissions (UGC) or Higher Education Commissions (HEC) that work in tandem with relevant governmental ministries <sup>11</sup>.

The regulatory framework for HE in Bangladesh is anchored in several pivotal legal instruments, most notably the University Grants Commission Act of 1973, which was established by the President's Order (P.O.) No. 10 of 1973. This act laid the foundation for modern HE governance in Bangladesh, ensuring a structured approach to university education. Subsequent developments, such as the Private University Act of 1992, marked a significant expansion of the HE landscape by allowing the establishment of private universities. The Private University Act of 2010 further refined this framework by introducing stricter regulations and guidelines for private institutions, reflecting the government's commitment to maintaining educational standards across all sectors.

Comparatively, the evolution of HE in other South Asian countries reveals both similarities and divergences. For instance, Afghanistan's HE system is regulated by the Ministry of Higher Education, which oversees the operations of both public and private Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) under the National Higher Education Strategic Plans (NHESP I and NHESP II) (Couch, 2018). In India, the University Grants Commission Act of 1956 continues to serve as the

<sup>11</sup> Padma M Sarangapani and Rekha Pappu, "Education Systems in South Asia," *Global Education Systems* (Springer Singapore, 2021), [http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0032-9\\_77](http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0032-9_77).

foundational legal framework, supplemented by state-specific acts for private universities and the Higher Education and Research (HE&R) Bill of 2011. Similarly, Nepal's HE is governed by the University Grants Commission Act of 2013, while Pakistan's system operates under the Higher Education Commission Ordinance of 2002. Sri Lanka's Universities Act No. 16 of 1978 plays a comparable role in regulating its HE sector. These frameworks underscore the region's shared emphasis on structured governance and quality assurance in HE.

Government expenditure on education in Bangladesh, while substantial, remains inconsistent year-to-year, with allocations fluctuating in response to broader economic conditions. Currently, Bangladesh allocates approximately 1.33% of its GDP to the education sector, which is relatively low compared to other South Asian nations (Sarangapani & Pappu, 2021). For instance, Bhutan allocates the highest percentage of its government expenditure to education (23%), followed by Afghanistan (16%), and Pakistan (15%), while Bangladesh's expenditure is around 15%. Notably, the allocation of funds within Bangladesh's education sector skews heavily toward current expenditures, particularly staff salaries, which account for 73% of the total education budget. Capital expenditures, which are critical for infrastructure development and long-term sustainability, receive only 14% of the budget <sup>12</sup>.

The disparities in funding and enrollment rates further illustrate the challenges facing Bangladesh's HE sector. With only 13.44% of eligible students enrolling in tertiary education, Bangladesh lags behind India, where the enrollment rate is 23.89%, and the regional average of 34.4% <sup>13</sup>. This discrepancy highlights the need for targeted investments in HE, particularly in regions like Sylhet, where educational infrastructure and access remain inadequate.

The Sylhet division, home to approximately 6.67% of Bangladesh's population, is served by a disproportionately small number of HE institutions. Despite the region's rich educational history, it hosts only 6.32% of the nation's universities (10 out of 158), 6.14% of medical colleges (7 out of 114), 5.12% of National University-affiliated colleges (85 out of 1660), and 3.87% of tertiary-level Madrasas (52 out of 1343). This underrepresentation is further compounded by Sylhet's low literacy rates—40.7% for individuals aged 7 and above, compared to the national average of 48.5%, and 44.4% for adult literacy, versus the national average of 52.1% <sup>14</sup>.

Several studies have examined the challenges facing HE in the Sylhet division. Rahman and Chowdhury <sup>15</sup> identified significant skills gaps among graduates, while Latif and Malakar <sup>16</sup> highlighted inefficiencies in the education system, noting that many programs offered by universities in Sylhet fail to equip students with the skills needed for the job market. Khaled and Rejaul (2018) similarly pointed out that the quality of HE in Sylhet does not meet global standards, further exacerbating the region's educational challenges.

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<sup>12</sup> Carolina Bloch, "Social Spending in South Asia—an Overview of Government Expenditure on Health, Education and Social Assistance" (2020).

<sup>13</sup> Sarangapani and Pappu, "Education Systems in South Asia."

<sup>14</sup> Education Watch, 2009-2010

<sup>15</sup> Mohammad Mizenur Rahaman and Mosaddak Ahmed Chowdhury, "Bridging the Gap between Educational Needs for Development and Current Education Systems in Sylhet," *Journal of Education and Practice* 7, no. 14 (2016): 156–167.

<sup>16</sup> Abdul Latif, Shuvo Malakar, and Dwarak Krisna Das, "Wastage in Higher Education in Developing Country: A Comparative Study on Selected Graduates of Private and Public Universities of Sylhet, Bangladesh" (n.d.).

In terms of regulatory compliance, private universities in Sylhet generally meet the basic requirements outlined in the Private University Act of 2010, such as having a minimum land area of 25,000 square feet and at least 2 acres of land for permanent certification. However, issues remain, such as delayed shifts to permanent campuses and inconsistencies in departmental offerings. For instance, while all universities in Sylhet operate under four faculties, one institution offers only five departments, falling short of the act's stipulations. Furthermore, not all universities have complied with the requirement to submit financial statements to the UGC, raising concerns about transparency and accountability.

Among the private universities in Sylhet, Leading University stands out as the top performer. It excels in several key areas, including student enrollment, graduation rates, faculty qualifications, and the provision of academic facilities and student support services. The university has also made significant strides in internationalization, enhancing its academic reputation and positioning itself as a leader in the region's HE sector.

### **Managerial Implications of the Study**

This study has several important managerial implications. First, it provides a comprehensive overview of the regulatory framework governing HE in Bangladesh, offering insights that can be used to benchmark against global standards. This comparison can help policymakers identify areas where further reforms are needed to align Bangladesh's HE sector with international best practices.

Second, the analysis of government expenditure on education highlights the need for more consistent and targeted investments in HE, particularly in regions like Sylhet that have been historically underfunded. The findings suggest that reallocating resources to enhance capital expenditures, such as infrastructure development, could significantly improve educational outcomes.

Third, the study's examination of HE opportunities in the Sylhet division provides valuable insights for policymakers and educational planners. By comparing the availability of educational institutions in Sylhet with national averages, the study identifies key gaps that need to be addressed to ensure equitable access to quality education across all regions.

Finally, the performance evaluation of private universities in Sylhet, particularly Leading University, offers a model of best practices that other institutions can emulate. The success of Leading University in areas such as faculty development, student support, and academic infrastructure demonstrates the potential for private institutions to play a leading role in improving HE in Bangladesh. These findings can be used by university administrators to promote their institutions and attract more students, faculty, and funding, further contributing to the development of the HE sector in Sylhet and beyond.

### **Conclusion**

Education is universally acknowledged by researchers, policymakers, donors, and development practitioners as the cornerstone of sustainable development. Historically, Bangladesh faced significant challenges in the development of its educational institutions, particularly in the higher education (HE) sector, which was largely neglected. However, following the country's

liberation in 1971, education was identified as a critical sector for national reformation and development. This recognition led to the establishment of various Acts, regulations, and education commissions, with successive governments implementing the recommendations from these reports.

The HE sector in Bangladesh began to gain significant traction in the early 1990s, particularly with the enactment of the Private University Act of 1992. This momentum was further accelerated by the Private University Act of 2010, which catalyzed the growth of HE across the country. Government investments in the HE sector have been steadily increasing, reflecting the country's commitment to enhancing educational outcomes. Today, Bangladesh boasts 158 universities and numerous other HE institutions, all contributing to the nation's educational progress. However, the geographic distribution of these institutions remains uneven, presenting a challenge to equitable access to education. To achieve sustainable development, it is imperative that the government addresses these disparities.

In the Sylhet division, there are currently only 10 universities, with Leading University emerging as a standout performer. Despite its relatively recent establishment, Leading University has gained national and international recognition for its academic achievements. However, the present study focuses primarily on the HE sector in the Sylhet division, leaving several critical areas unexplored. While the study provides insights into government investments in education, it does not specify the allocation of these investments within the Sylhet division. Additionally, while the performance of private universities in Sylhet is assessed based on metrics such as the number of graduates and academic facilities, the study does not evaluate the quality of education provided by these institutions. Furthermore, the performance of other universities in the region remains unexamined.

Given these limitations, future research should aim to provide a more comprehensive overview of the entire education sector in the Sylhet division, including detailed analysis of government allocations to the region. Comparative studies could be conducted to evaluate the performance of Sylhet's education sector relative to other divisions in Bangladesh. Additionally, the quality of education at Leading University warrants further investigation, along with the performance of other HE institutions in the division. Future studies could explore and compare the effectiveness of private versus public institutions in generating graduates, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of the HE landscape in Sylhet.

This approach will not only shed light on the specific challenges and opportunities within the Sylhet division but also contribute to the broader discourse on educational equity and quality in Bangladesh.

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