

Quality Assurance in Bangladesh's Higher Education: The Role of BAC in Bridging Equity Gaps, Skill Mismatches, and Socioeconomic Outcomes

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Abstract

Bangladesh is striving to achieve the status of a developed nation by 2041, which will include creating a strong and skilled workforce that will serve as a central pillar of this national agenda. Since its establishment in 2017, the Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC) has been playing a key role in ensuring the enhancement and improvement of the quality of higher education. In this paper its analysis how BAC's quality assurance efforts are impacting the broader picture of equitable educational opportunities, graduates' employability, and social and economic growth. Based on policies, national statistics, and research from 2017 to the present, we have created a thematic summary. What stands out is that accreditation has helped create more open systems, refreshed curricula, and better synced skills with what employers want. But these problems such as women only accounting for 14-30% of places in STEM programs, rural dropouts 30% higher than urban ones, and an overall graduate unemployment rate of 13.5% in 2024 (jumping to 20% for women) are hindering progress. At the end of the day, BAC is certainly raising the bar, but to realize its true potential, we need to raise reliable funding, strengthen efforts in rural areas, strengthen the technological side, and build

strong bridges between colleges and the job market.

Keywords: Bangladesh Accreditation Council, higher education, equity, employability, socioeconomic development, quality assurance

1. Introduction

The past few decades have seen tremendous changes in higher education in Bangladesh. By 2018, more than 3.6 million students were enrolled in universities, mostly because more school going students were finishing primary and secondary school (World Bank, 2025). This boom lines up with the country's accelerated toward a knowledge-driven economy, as sketched out in Vision 2041. Yet, for all that growth, the results aren't even across the board. Take unemployment among graduates it shot up from 8.3% back in 2015-16 to a staggering 33.33% during the 2020-21 pandemic peak, before easing to 13.5% by 2024 still the highest rate compared to other education levels. Women's involvement is spotty too, especially in STEM, where they hover around 14-21% of enrollees, though some reports nudge that up to 30% for those choosing STEM paths (Asadullah & Wahhaj, 2021; UNICEF, 2021). And then there's the rural-urban split: rural areas see way higher dropouts, often because of shaky

infrastructure and money troubles, making up about 80% of all school dropouts nationwide (The Daily Star, 2024). Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC), set up as an independent outfit to vet universities and programs align the national qualifications framework (BNQF). It's all about promoting results-focused teaching, solid leadership, and inclusive vibes (Bangladesh Accreditation Council, 2024). With such a big challenge, it seems quite urgent to find out where BAC helps or fails to make higher education fair and employment-oriented. Here, we look at BAC's role in three linked areas educational fairness, job readiness, and impact of socio-economic waves. By blending recent policies, surveys, and research, this analysis weighs how accreditation fits into Bangladesh's overall development story.

2. Literature Review

People often see accreditation as a solid way to keep higher education on track for quality and responsibility, especially when systems grow faster than the rules can keep up (Hakim et al., 2019). BAC's 2024 handbook hits on key stuff like governance, course setup, teacher growth, and student help (Bangladesh Accreditation Council, 2024). But really, it boils down to how higher education institute actually put these ideas into action.

2.1. Educational Equity

Getting fair access to higher education is still a tough nut to crack in Bangladesh. Women's tertiary enrollment has climbed to about 38-40%, but in STEM, it's a different story figures range from a low 14% to around 30%, showing deep-rooted biases and workplace hurdles (Asadullah & Wahhaj, 2021). Students from rural areas have it way tougher when it comes to dropping out, mainly because of crappy infrastructure, tight family budgets, and not

much in the way of support systems (Haque et al., 2024). The pandemic really shone a light on the digital divide, slamming rural women the hardest since they often didn't have access to devices or reliable internet (Sarker et al., 2024).

2.2. Employability

Bangladesh's job market has this ongoing mismatch where skills don't line up with needs. Employers gripe about grads lacking basics like problem-solving or clear communication (Martin & Godonoga, 2022; Pham et al., 2024). BAC pushes for fixes like internships, industry chats, and outcome-based classes, and HEIs that buy in often see better placement numbers. Still, unemployment lingers high; in 2021, nearly half the jobless youth had degrees, and by 2024, it's at 13.5% overall for graduates, with women at 20% (Journal of Management and Business Education, 2025).

2.3. Socioeconomic Outcomes

Accreditation should ripple out to bigger wins, like boosting the economy. Accredited spots show more entrepreneurship around 20% higher and better global cred (Daily Sun, 2025; ENIC, 2025). But only about a third of unis are geared up for quality checks, watering down the impact (INQAAHE, 2023). As well as, relying on imported skills costs the country USD 5-6 billion a year (World Bank, 2019).

3. Methodology

We put together a bunch of different sources to get a better grip on the Bangladesh Accreditation Council's (BAC) role, using something called qualitative meta-synthesis basically, blending insights from various places to form a broader perspective. The materials I drew from where things like the official BAC manuals (the ones from 2019 and 2024), along with the Vision 2041

document; some national numbers from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' 2024 Labor Force Survey and education stats from the World Bank; research papers spanning 2017 through 2025 that cover stuff like fairness in education, accreditation processes, and job outcomes; plus odds and ends from policy think tanks, international bodies, and trustworthy news articles.

The way we analyzed it all was in three parts: first off, we skimmed through everything to pick out common threads, such as issues around equity and how governance works; next, we tried to connect the dots between BAC's accreditation tools and the actual effects they're having; and then, we pulled it all into a cohesive summary of the main points, throwing in some hard data like accreditation percentages and other benchmarks for support.

A major drawback is that this all comes from existing reports and data, so it could skip over the gritty details of what's really going on in specific colleges or universities, not to mention missing out on firsthand accounts from folks on the ground. On top of that, BAC hasn't been around long enough to see its full effects yet. Looking ahead, it'd help to add in some original research, maybe by following up with graduates over time, running surveys with key players, or zooming in on case studies from particular HEIs.

4. Findings

4.1. Educational Equity

There are still all these built-in roadblocks that make it tough for everyone to get into and finish higher education on equal footing. Take the gender divide it's sticking around, with women only accounting for about 38% of students overall, and they're way underrepresented in STEM fields, showing up in just 14-30% of those spots (Asadullah & Wahhaj, 2021). On top of that, there's this

huge split between rural and urban areas, where dropouts are 30% higher in rural HEIs, and BAC accreditation is way lower too around 50% there compared to 80% in cities. It's no surprise that rural kids make up a whopping 80% of all dropouts (The Daily Star, 2024), and a lot of that boils down to money troubles, since 18% of folks from low-income backgrounds say that's, the biggest thing holding them back from graduating (Global Partnership for Education, 2020).

The COVID-19 mess just made these problems worse. It hit harder on the folks who were already struggling, with rural women seeing 15-20% more dropouts than other groups (Sarker et al., 2024). Basically, big disruptions like that don't hit everyone the same they just widen the gaps based on gender and where you live.

4.2. Employability

Even though the job market is bouncing back, university grads are still struggling to find work because of a big gap in the skills they're learning. According to national stats, overall unemployment dropped to 13.5% in 2024, but that hides a tough reality for female graduates, where the rate stays stuck at 20% (BBS, 2024). The main issue is that what institutes teach doesn't line up with what bosses actually want three-quarters of employers say new hires are missing key soft skills, things like critical thinking and good communication (Pham et al., 2024). On top of that, there's a real mismatch in specialized fields: way too many people graduating in business or social sciences, while sectors like tech and healthcare are desperate for talent (Centre for Policy Dialogue, 2025).

All this points to why vocational training could be a game changer, since it leads to better job results right away. About half of those who go through vocational programs land jobs, which shows it's better at

matching what the market needs (Rahman, 2024). That said, there's a big flaw in the system the weak connection between these vocational paths and the Bangladesh Accreditation Council's standards. It creates a barrier that stops this effective method from getting the recognition it deserves and being folded into the country's overall higher education plan.

4.3. Socioeconomic Outcomes

BAC accreditation really does a lot of good for graduates and the Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) reputations. Accredited places are reporting a 20% bump in grads starting their own businesses, which points to a solid connection between keeping quality high and sparking new ideas (Daily Sun, 2025). On top of that, it boosts how well people can move around internationally degrees from these institutions get 32% better acceptance overseas (ENIC, 2025), and that's a big deal for plugging into the worldwide economy.

Still, even with those upsides, there are deep-rooted problems holding things back. A big one is how few HEIs are actually geared up for it, with just 30% of universities ready for full accreditation (INQAAHE, 2023). That shortfall really highlights the mismatch between what the country needs in terms of skills and what higher ed is churning out, especially when you consider we're shelling out \$5-6 billion a year on workers from abroad (World Bank, 2019). All that cash flowing out just screams for a stronger accreditation setup to grow our own talent and dial back on depending so much on outsiders.

5. Discussion

The analysis found that the Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC) has come a long way in establishing systems to ensure the quality of education, but major obstacles remain due to ongoing disparities and

disconnects with the real needs of the job market. In terms of fairness, BAC's efforts on issues such as impartial admissions and helping students are a good start, yet old social norms and money issues stand in the way, making it difficult to truly change. Unless we take action to address more concrete solutions, these gaps are likely to persist. Look at the gender equality index, which is stuck at 0.82 and not decreasing. In terms of jobs, of course, graduates from accredited HEIs tend to do better, but with unemployment so high across the country, especially for women, it's clear that simply changing things inside universities isn't going to cut it. We need to engage employers and the economy more actively. The bigger picture of accreditation looks promising, such as boosting institutional reputation and creating more entrepreneurship among graduates, but since few higher education institutes are ready for it, we could end up with a fragmented system where innovative urban universities will advance and rural universities will be left further behind. To make the work of the BAC more relevant, future policies should emphasize increasing public education funding to 2-3% of GDP, better linking vocational training with higher education accreditation, and increasing digital access nationwide so that everyone has a fair chance of a decent education.

6. Conclusion

The Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC) has really secured the basics when it comes to setting up a solid system for keeping higher education quality in check. But honestly, when you look at the bigger aspect like making things fairer for everyone, Helping graduates get good jobs, and pushing society towards a better future, as it is still in its early stages and facing some setbacks. Accreditation has clearly led to better management of universities, the

development of skills that match the needs of the job world, and better representation for the HEIs concerned. Still, there are these tough, ongoing hurdles holding it back, like serious gender gaps, the huge difference between city and countryside life, and education not syncing up with what employers need. All that stuff keeps the whole setup from working as well as it could.

If Bangladesh is serious about securing its Vision 2041 goals, accreditation has to step up from just being a checklist thing. It all depends on fitting it comfortably into a broader push for education changes. We're talking about ramping up government cash, launching smart programs to bring in folks who've been left out, and creating real ties between higher education institutes and the industry. It's only by going all-in on this strategy that the BAC can go from basically just spotting issues to actually powering fair, long-term growth for the nation.

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