The Role of Institutional Pressures on the Use of Quality Assurance Practices in Enhancing Effectiveness: A Case Study of Higher Education Institution of Bangladesh

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Abstract

The focus of this study is to explore the institutional pressures and their influence on the use of quality assurance (QA) practices in the higher education institution (HEIs) of a developing country. The findings show that the use of QA practices was the result of three institutional pressures, i.e, coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures. The findings reveal the gradual changes in the nature and intensity of institutional pressure. The changes in institutions QA practices arose due to coercive pressures, including the preferences of stakeholders and regulatory bodies including the University Grants Commission (UGC), Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC) aimed at improving the academic standards including academic content and academic programs, curriculum review, research, and establishment of formal QA framework. While mimetic pressures were attributed to the high competition and the resultant uncertainty within the HEI, the normative pressures emerged due to the influence of top management support and training. Moreover, results reveal the effects of QA practices on the effectiveness of the case in terms of increased satisfaction of stakeholders, public image, employability, improved internal and external processes, and stakeholders' confidence. The study contributes to the quality management literature and developing country literature by providing knowledge about institutional pressures and their subsequent impact on QA practices in HEI within a developing country.

Keywords: Quality Assurance Practices, Institutional Pressures, Higher Education Institutions, Case Study, Developing Country.

1. Introduction

Globalization, technological advancement, and the impact of liberalization have brought several changes in organizations. The increasing competition has been challenging organizations to employ various quality improvement approaches that facilitate production of quality goods and services (Ferdousi et al., 2019; Duh et al., 2012). These challenges resulted in enhanced use of Quality Management (QM) practices including Just-in-

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Time (JIT), Total Quality Management (TQM), Quality Assurance (QA), Six Sigma, Lean Production, and so on (Ferdousi et al., 2019; Talib et al., 2013).

Among these tools, QA has brought changes in management practices which in turn result in organizational effectiveness. QA refers to the design and implementation of both evaluation and accreditation processes (Harvey and Green, 1993).

However, the increasing recognition of higher education (HE) as a major driver of economic competitiveness has made quality in higher education more important than ever before (OECD, 2010). The stakeholders' concern regarding the quality of programs offered to students led to public assessments and international comparisons of higher education institutions (OECD, 2010). HE is a comprehensive system of creativity and innovation, which has a significant impact on the sustainable socioeconomic development of a nation (William, 2014). The urge for excellence and learner satisfaction represents a commitment of HE to quality and accountability (Rosa, 2012). Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have emphasized quality as a key tool to survive and make a difference from others (Aly and Akpovi, 2001). Given the importance of quality, HEIs have started to emphasize adoption of QA practices through strengthening QA policies evolving from relevant national educational legislation and directives. Therefore, they are in search of a formal framework for continuously changing the QA practices in academic programs while maintaining and improving the academic standards.

The term QA in HE indicates the practices that facilitate the attainment of academic standards (Dill, 2007). QA is a holistic approach that covers all processes in HEIs to serve students and other stakeholders following expected quality standards. It is a set of well-structured processes that facilitates educational institutions to achieve their desired goal, thereby to fulfill their objectives. In other words, the QA process determines whether the graduates coming out of institutions achieve the expected standard in terms of skills, attitudes, and values that meet the expectations of society (William, 2014). "Consequently, quality assurance (QA) has an important role in monitoring an institution's processes and performance of achievements, whereby it serves in a consistent application and continuous improvement of processes and reduces the scope for variability" (Gamage et al. 2020). Academic program indicates the integration of courses for educational attainment that satisfies the requirements of any degree or certificate etc. (Self-Assessment Manual, 2016).

Academic standards refers to the level of academic achievement attained by higher education graduates are maintained and improved (Dill, 2010).

However, there are a large number of studies that have examined the adoption of QA in HE (Mok, 2000; Marock, 2000; Kis, 2005; Hoecth, 2006; Ryan, 2015; Kahveci et al. 2012). Some studies have looked into the factors that influence organizations to use QM practices, including QA practices. These studies have examined the association of various contingency factors including, globalization, legal framework, enrollment, expansion policy, and socio-cultural factors in the association between QA and HE (Mok, 2000; Kashsay, 2012). These studies have not included the impact of institutional pressures derived from the changes in the institutional environment (changes attributable to the government, regulatory bodies, accredited companies) (Ferdousi et al., 2016), which influence organizations to adopt QA. It is important to understand these institutional pressures by the organizations as their QA practices need to change along with their institutional environment (Munir et al., 2013). Therefore, the present study is an attempt to provide an insight into the influence of institutional pressures on the adoption of QA.

According to the institutional theory, institutions can enforce the behavior of organizations (Scott, 1995:2001; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The foundation of institutional theory is based on the ideas of Meyer & Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio & Powell (1983). According to their view organizations conform to pressures exerted by institutions. This study uses the idea of DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional pressures and explores the influence of institutional pressures, namely coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures on the use of QA. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), the dependency on other organizations for various resources results in coercive pressure; while mimetic pressure arises when organizations face uncertainty and imitate approaches similar to other organizations to gain legitimacy. Normative pressure derives from professionalization and arises when professional bodies develop specific rules, norms, and values to follow and the managers within an organization follow them (Munir et al., 2013; Papadimitrio and Westerheijden, 2010).

Some recent studies that have focused on institutional perspective to examine the use of different quality improvement approaches, including Six Sigma (Braunscheidel et al., 2011), inter-organizational linkages (Teo et al., 2003), environmental management accounting (Jalaludin et al., 2011), ISO-oriented quality (Papadimitriou, 2010), and TQM (Ferdousi et al. 2019; Ahmed and Ferdousi, 2020; Ferdousi et al. 2016; Westphal et al., 1997). However, little (Seyfried et al. 2019; Geda, 2014) is known regarding the

use of QA from an institutional perspective. Moreover, most of these studies mainly concentrated on the influence of institutional factors that affect organizations operating within developed countries (Westphal et al., 1997; Zinn, 1998).

However, it is not reasonable to use the findings of studies conducted in the developed countries for the purpose of developing countries as these two groups have different characteristics in many aspects, including economic, social, political, and cultural environments that surround an organization (Hawkins and Mihaljek, 2001). Therefore, given their unique environment, it is thus important to consider developing countries as a research setting given their unique environments. Therefore, given the limited studies (Seyfried et. al. 2019; Geda, 2014), this study further adds value and contributes to the literature examining the use of QA in higher education institution from a developing country perspective.

Moreover, there are only a few researches (Karumba and George, 2013; Seyfried et al., 201; Lillis, 2012) that demonstrate the effect of QA in enhancing the effectiveness of HEIs. These studies (Karumba and George, 2013; Seyfried et al., 2019; Lillis, 2012) have shown effectiveness in terms of improved customer satisfaction, improved organizational outcomes, and increased revenue inflows. Therefore, the study further contributes to the literature by extending its focus on examining the effect of QA in increasing the effectiveness of HEI in Bangladesh.Accordingly, the study focuses on the following research question:

What is the influenceofinstitutionalpressures on the useof QA practices in enhancing the effectiveness of higher education institution in Bangladesh?

Based on this research question, the studyfocuses on the following research objectives: (1) to explore the nature and extentof QA practices in the higher education institution in Bangladesh (2) to explore the influence of institutional pressures on the useof QA practices in the higher education institution in Bangladesh (3) to explore the impactof QA practices on enhancing the effectiveness of higher education institution in Bangladesh.

2. Theoretical Framework

The New Institutional Sociology (NIS) strand of institutional theory indicates that the elements of the wider environment influence the behavior of organizations. According to the NIS, to gain legitimacy organizational behavior focuses more on environmental pressures, particularly, organizations on which they are dependent. Previously, the emphasis was

on the technical environment, resources, and technical know-how; however, institutional theory has shifted to emphasize the importance of the social and cultural environment, particularly social knowledge and cultural practices (Buhrman,2011).The institutional theory views institutions as social structures which can enforce behavior (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). According to the notion of institutional theory by DiMaggio & Powell (1983), organizations conform to pressures exerted by institutions. The theory implies that an organization is a system under which the members are involved in changing the organizational arrangement and practices (Scott, 1998). DiMaggio & Powell (1983) viewedorganizational similarity as a consequence of legitimacy and it is found to be beneficial to conform to institutional pressures. The increased level of legitimacy, social status, commitment, loyalty, and conformity may derive from the conformity of institutional pressures (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995). There are three types of institutional pressures identified by DiMaggio & Powell, (1983) namely, coercive pressure, normative pressure, and mimetic pressure. Coercive pressures arise when organizations are forced to conform to institutional rules and regulations. These types of pressures may occur between organizations where there are power differences. For instance, in HEIs the stakeholders place pressure on institutions to maintain specified policies and guidelines to increase the quality of the output. In addition, stakeholders give preferences to those institutions that comply with the preferences.

Normative pressures driven by professional bodies that encourage institutions to accept certain processes, structures, and systems, thereby placing pressure on organizations that feel obliged to adopt them (Burns, 2000). According to Braunscheidel et al. (2011) university specialists and professional organizations indicate the professional bodies that advocate the rapid diffusion of changes. In HEIs, top management and faculty members influence institutions to adopt various practices through organizing training, workshops and educational programs.

Furthermore, mimetic pressure arises due to environmental uncertainty (Munir et al., 2011). In this respect, Braunschedel et al. (2011) mentioned, under uncertain environmental conditions, organizations tend to copy or imitate the practices of similar successful firms. Mimetic pressure describes an organization's adoption of similar structures and processes (DiMaggio and Powell (1983). For example, the competition and the resultant uncertainty led institutions to imitate teaching-learning tools and techniques, procedures, or QA practices of other effective HEIs to maintain their position.

Using DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) notion of institutional theory, this study will explore the influence of coercive, mimetic, and normative factors on the use of QA and its effectiveness of HEI.

3. Literature Review

This section provides a review of literature concerning the use of QA in organizations, in particular, in HEIs. In addition, this section provides related literature on the institutional pressures that affect the QA practices of HEIs. This section also covers the studies that focused on the impact of QA on the effectiveness of HEIs. The rapid increase in competition, fast changes in technology, increasing quality standards, demographic changes, and privatization in education have resulted in the use of QM practices in highereducation (Abubakar et al. 2016). In line with that, Dill (2007) mentioned that the increasing importance of human capital in the development of economic and social aspects of societies led to a search for new methods of assuring and improving academic standards. The review of literature suggests that QA is considered as a key aspect of HEIs as articulated in the development of policies, structures and systems (Geda, 2014). Some view QA as how an institution maintains and enhances its quality standard (Petersen, 1999). In line with that, Borahan and Ziarati (2002) viewed QA as a way to increase confidence in assuring its quality requirements by HEI. Similarly, QA indicates a set of methods targeting to satisfy the purpose of HEIs, in addition to meeting other quality standards at a program or institutional level (Ryan, 2015).

However, a large number of studies have examined QA in the context of higher education. While some studies have addressed QA as a concept (Elassy, 2015; Harvey & Green, 1993; Harvey & Knight, 1996; Lomas & Ursin, 2009), some have focused on its dimensions (Owlia& Aspinwall, 1996; Lagrosen et al., 2004), a few have focused on the practices of QA (Asiayi, 2020). However, the advanced research on QA emphasized more on justifying the practices to develop an understanding of the effect of context on use of QA. For example, few studies have used contingency based research to search for conditions that facilitate the use of QA (Mok, 2000; Kashsay, 2012). There are only a few studies (Sayfried et al. 2019; Geda, 2014) which have examined the use of QA from an institutional perspective. The study by Geda, (2014) shows the impact of organizational environments on the use of QA in HEIs. The results indicate that there are very few steps taken by the public HEIs in enhancing quality activities, whereas legitimacy is found as a dominant factor for securing stability and survival. It also emphasizes that organizations may respond to environmental pressures through formal and symbolic steps. In this respect,

Seyfried et al. (2019) mentioned the impact of coercive, mimetic and normative pressures on the use of QA practices in the perspective of higher education. Findings reveal that isomorphism is a leading driver behind the adoption of QM practices, including the QA practices in German higher education institutions. However, considering these limited studies, this study aims to provide further insight into the influence of three pressures, namely coercive, mimetic and normative pressures on the use of QA in the HEIs.

However, there are a few studies (Karumba and George, 2013; Seyfried and Pohlenz, 2018; Lillis, 2012) that have focused on the impact of QA in increasing the effectiveness of HEIs. In line with that, Karumba and George (2013) showed the impact of QA strategy on the increased satisfaction of customer and organizational outcomes; and increased revenue inflows. In a similar vein, Lillis (2012), concluded that social-program evaluation has significant potential in evaluating the effectiveness of QA initiatives in higher education. Moreover, Seyfried and Pohlenz, (2018), expressed effectiveness in terms of structural variables and activities related to quality assurance. Theresults show that support by HEIs' top management and cooperation with other educational institutions are relevant preconditions for perceived degrees of quality assurance effectiveness. Therefore, considering the limited studies, this study also aims to provide further insight into the impact of QA practices in enhancing the effectiveness of HEIs in a developing country. However, in developing countries, higher education confronts issues including expansion, resource scarcity, increased competition, accountability to more stakeholders and the growing complexity of knowledge (Materu, 2007). Moreover, over the last decade there has been a significant growth of tertiary institutions and increased enrollment of students made Bangladesh an exemplar phenomenon of massification of HE. However, because of this improved access to HE (Trow 2007), one of the greatest limitations lies in the lack of QA policies which warrant best teaching and learning practices in Bangladeshi HEIs while maintaining and continually improving its standard (Rahnuma, 2020). Therefore, it is critical to explore the extent of QA practices adopted by the HEI's and the factors that drive the QA practices.

3. Method
The HEI is chosen because of the importance of this sector as affected by various constraints ranging from lack of accountability for performance among institutions and weak QA mechanisms (Mannan, 2015). One case HEI (here after Case 1 from the private institutions) was purposively chosen based on their reputation, the number of PhDs as well as their important

contributions to society. Considering the time constraintsthe researcher only considers the Faculty of Business and Economics. The 'Faculty of Business and Economics' for Case 1 was considered as it is the largest consisting of two departments with around 80 faculty members.The result of the study may not be generalizable.

A qualitative approach was used to gain a better understanding of the influence of institutional pressures, in particular coercive, mimetic and normative pressures on the use of QA and its impact on the effectiveness of HEI. Using an interview schedule (open ended questions), data was collected to obtain information concerning the context, changes, and various internal and external organizational factors that brought such changes. Data was collected by the researcher and the research associate.

Purposive sampling was used to conduct 10 to 11 face-to-face interviews with faculty members, top management, and relevant quality officers from the case institutions (Tables 1). Interviewees were required: (i) to have had involvement with QA activities in case institutions; and; (ii) to be willing to participate in the study. The interview was continued until the repeat of the responses. Due permission was taken from the respondents through email or over the telephone.While participants were allowed to conduct the interview in both Bangla and English, a large number of respondents responded in English and only a few respondents gave their response in Bangla.Accordingly, the Bangla interviews were transcribed and translated. Data was analyzed using NVivo software (NVivo is a software which is used for qualitative research and facilitates the analysis of text, audio, video, and image data, including interviews, focus groups, surveys, social media, and journal articles).

Table 1: List of participants

Case 1 (Faculty of Business and Economics)	
Respondents	Department
Respondent 1	Department of Business Administration
Respondent 2	Department of Business Administration
Respondent 3	Department of Economics
Respondent 4	Department of Economics
Respondent 5	Department of Business Administration
Respondent 6	IQAC
Respondent 7	Department of Business Administration
Respondent 8	Department of Economics
Respondent 9	Top Management
Respondent 10	Department of Business Administration
Respondent 11	Department of Economics

While at the early stage of data analysis, the data was grouped into many codes. Finally, these codes were specifically categorized into coercive pressures (directives from UGC, BAC, and top management), mimetic pressures (competition and resultant uncertainty) and normative pressures (top management support, professional institutions, employee training and programs; changes in company culture). The documents used included meeting minutes, bulletins and institutions' websites. Furthermore, evidence was also collected from other records, including the UGC's instructions. The triangulation method (within method) was incorporated where the responses of the interviews and the documents collected from various sources as well as observation were compared (McKinnon, 1988). The use of multiple data sources reduces the risk of avalidity issue because it is related to different research contexts or to different information about the same research that is comparable.The reliability was ensured through the use of archival documents.

4. The Context of QA in HEIs in Bangladesh

The quick expansion of higher education systems led to different types of higher education providers, including public and private institutions, cross-border institutions and distance education institutions. However, whatever the type, the economic and other constraints are always considered as inhibiting factors that impact the quality of HEIs in many developing countries. There is always a negative view about the quality of higher education in Bangladesh(Islam, 2007). Research showed that many HEIs in Bangladesh failed to produce skilled graduates that are ready for industry (Chisty et al. 2007). It is claimed that despite having excellent academic results, graduates have poor communication skills to meet the requirements of the industry (Khan 2010).

In Bangladesh, till 2015, there was no national level quality assurance system covering the entire HEI sector. There is no effective QA wing at the University Grants Commission (UGC) to ensure QA in HEIs. However, the strategic plan for Higher Education emphasized this issue (Institutional Quality Assurance Cell Fund Operations Manual, 2015) and suggested a formal body (Accredited Council) that facilitates both public and private institutions. The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) prepared the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP) with the World Bank's financial support and started its implementation in 2009. Accordingly, the HEIs are instructed to establish IQAC to ensure institutional level QA. Moreover, The Ministry of Education, The People's Republic of Bangladesh has also approved Bangladesh National Qualifications Framework (BNQF) as per section 15 (1) of the ACT 2017.

4.1 Case 1

Case 1 is a private university providing education at a reasonable cost in Bangladesh. It was first initiated by a group of leading academicians, distinguished educationists, corporate leaders and professionals. It is one of the top private universities in Bangladesh, providing tertiary education, at a reasonable cost in a range of subjects to satisfy the current and anticipated social needs. While Case 1 is highly dedicated to maintaining high quality in every aspect of education and research (meeting minutes, Bulletin and brochures), it also provides community service through several activities, including circulating information, arranging training programs, and other activities. Case 1is always committed towards offering an environment of productive learning and innovative thinking (Source: EWU Website).

However, among the other faculties, the Faculty of Business and Economics (as it is the focus of the case) is focused on creating opportunities for career advancement and leadership positions (meeting minutes and website). The programs are designed to enhance global business and economic skills, flexible technological knowledge, thereby to meet current and future challenges. Faculty members are research-oriented and are dedicated to creating knowledge through research (meeting minutes, brochure, and bulletin).

4.2 The Nature and Extent of QA Practices of Case 1

Prior to 2015, Case 1, used to follow an internal QA mechanism that was not fully structured. A number of respondents mentioned that initially, while Case 1 started with a very simple QA practice, gradually it developed an internal framework of QA which was led by the founders (revealed from observation). The key focus of this framework was to monitor and evaluate its teaching methods, teachers 'performance, teacher selection, staff selection, student assessment, student admission, curriculum development, among other things. Respondents indicate that the given framework enabled them to manage the quality to some expected level. In this respect, respondent 5 expressed that, while there was only a small number of private universities operating in Bangladesh, Case 1 was not under much pressure to change the existing pattern of their QA mechanism. But due to the competition led by the increased number of public and private institutions, the existing quality practices began to change (revealed from observation). In this respect, respondent 2 indicates:

> *" ………… while there were only a small number of private universities in Bangladesh, the competition was not that fierce, our internal framework of QA worked well to manage quality to some expected level".*

However, respondent 1 also stated that at the beginning, the requirements of stakeholders' regarding QA were very minor and they were satisfied with the quality maintained by Case 1. The respondents' view suggests that Case 1 was not agitated about frequent changes in QA practices as management found the existing QA practices going well. In regard to that, respondent 2 expressed:

> *"………….Our existing QA practices were found as satisfactory as there was no major complaint from the stakeholders. Due to less pressure from stakeholders, we were little concerned about changing the existing QA practices".*

However, it was apparent that there was a significant change occurred in Case 1's environment following the change in the requirements in the QA mechanism by the government through the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 2016. For example, the parameters for QA activities in this institution have become harder, which led to an urgent need for a framework that must have to ensure appropriate program delivery disciplines and governance. Accordingly, Case 1 developed a formal Framework of QA. These changes led to institutional pressures which subsequently led Case 1 to introduce the Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC). However, participants' view revealed that the changes in QA practices occurred due to various institutional pressures and some of these pressures were found to have a greater influence than others, as discussed in the following sections.

4.3 Institutional Pressures to Change QA Practices
4.3.1 Coercive pressures

The initial coercive pressures arose due to the stakeholders. Their concern regarding the quality of HE led to the pressure on Case 1 to look back to their existing QA practices. The gradual changes in stakeholders' preferences started to influence Case 1's processes, especially concerning the quality of academic standards, including academic programs and academic content. In particular, Case 1felt pressure to upgrade certain quality practices to comply with the expectations of the stakeholders. Under these circumstances, Case 1 was forced to upgrade the performance indicators and skills required for both faculty members and students. With an emphasis on graduate quality, Case 1 firstly, focused on student selection criteria which mainly focused on the admission process where the academic results with specific skills are emphasized (computer literacy, speaking ability) (respondent 3, 5, and 6). In line with that, the directives from top management led to a little harder assessment in terms of admission test questions, marking, and viva. However, these changes were the results of the stakeholders' expectations and viewed as a way to get the quality input

to produce good output (graduates) (respondent 9). However, following the stakeholders' pressure, secondly, the top management forced Case1 to focus on improving relevant skills and abilities of students, including the 'Critical Thinking skills', 'Analytical skills', 'Communication skills', 'Presentation skills' in enhancing the effectiveness of students to face the fierce competition. In this respect, the top management prioritized the critical role of faculty members in enabling students to do all kinds of learning through curricular and co-curricular activities (respondent 5). However, respondents mentioned that students were encouraged to be involved in different club activities and participate in various competitions where faculty members used to take the lead, thereby enhancing their skills and abilities. In line with that, respondent 4 expressed:

> *"……It was important to emphasize student activities in responding to the fierce competition. The directives from top management were crucial in bringing these changes… "*

However, over the time, the directives from top management led Case 1 to follow a framework that assists the institution in monitoring the quality of teachers and students, and thereby to track the satisfaction. As claimed by respondent 3, to enhance the faculty quality, Case 1 had to integrate a wide range of changes such as establishing visible quality measures (teaching/learning activities and assessments must have to align to the course objectives; participation in conferences, seminars, and workshops, research symposium), thereby to ensure a continuous improvement. In this regard, respondent 5 expressed:

> *"……while the academic achievement of graduates largely depends on faculty quality, the top management always focused on enhancing teachers' quality through creating various learning opportunities."*

In respect to enhancing the quality of teaching, respondent 1, expressed:

> *"... the increased awareness of improving academic standards led us to revise the criteria of academic appointment as well as the performance indicators of faculty members. However, these changes facilitated our institution by satisfying the stakeholders' expectations (Respondent 1). "*

Following the quality target by Case 1, PhD received additional emphasis to enhance the capability of the faculty member. While a PhD was previously required only for the most senior positions, Case 1 critically emphasized PhD as a mandatory requirement for the appointment of other academic positions as well as promoting faculty members from junior to senior positions under top management directives.As mentioned by the respondents, while Case 1 showed its concern in appointing the most

efficient faculty members, additional instruction from UGC led them to be more strict in this respect. Furthermore, respondent 3 stated that, in addition to a strict selection process, top management established slightly more stringent criteria for faculty and staff promotion.In addition, it is found that the faculty members were consistently instructed to publish research papers in peer-reviewed journals. According to respondent 7, these complex quality requirements were targeted by the stakeholders to enhance the quality of faculty research.

In line with that, respondent 6 mentioned:

> *"… it was a great initiative by the top authority to set harder appointment and promotion criteria, which we believe to be the best way to improve many aspects of faculty perfor-mance. ………in addition, the research fund as well as the faculty development fund were found as significant motivat-ing factors for the quality improvement…".*

To meet quality requirements set by stakeholders, top management also prioritized faculty evaluation as an important measure of improving faculty quality. Following the stakeholders' requirements, Case 1initiated "Research Fund" to motivate individual research or research in collaboration with others from within or outside the institution (respondent 1). Moreover, a "FacultyDevelopment Fund" was in place to encourage participation in conferences, workshops, and training.

Hence, the directives from the founder member coerced Case 1 to obtain 'Permanent Sanad' to satisfy stakeholders'requirements. While respondent 3 indicated that obtaining the 'Sanad' was a difficult process, this was accomplished through continuous support from all levels of people.As mentioned by respondent 3, among many other conditions to obtain the 'Sanad', the transparency of Case 1 in respect to student admission, teachers' recruitment, financial matters, governance is one of the conditions and a key requirement of stakeholders which is satisfiedby Case 1.

No other significant changes occurred until 2016. However, the initiation by the government of a national level QA Framework further forced Case 1 to ensure institutional accountability for performance. This external assessment process was in place to assess the existence, adequacy, and effectiveness of internal institutional QA mechanisms within institutions. Respondent 4 viewed that, similar to other institutions, Case 1 was also under pressure to establish IQAC as a means of improving quality continuously, thereby complying with the requirements of the stakeholders. Following this, a Director of IQAC has been appointed with prior

experience in QA activities. Under this cell, firstly, a "Self-Assessment" was conducted to identify the strengths, weaknesses, and the gap of Case 1. Following the report of Self-Assessment by "External Reviewers", the convener of SAC (Self -Assessment Committee) held several follow-up meetings. In these meetings, Case 1 emphasized the revision of the "Course Curriculum", and increasing some infrastructural facilities. As a result, a committee was formed to revise, update, and include new content in the existing curriculum as per requirements. However, respondents' view revealed that after 2016, UGC and top management led to further pressure to revisit all the aspects of QA practices concerning student, faculty, and academic programs as per national guidelines. Subsequently, the UGC and Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC) led additional pressure to adopt the 'Outcome Based Education' (OBE) system and accreditation of the programs. Hence, it was apparent that the preparation for accreditation was a rational decision by Case 1 to secure its position in the competitive market.

4.3.2 Mimetic Pressures
The extensive competition resulted from the inclusion of many private and public universities affected Case 1's operations. Accordingly, the focus on increasing the number of job placements led Case 1 to observe the competitors and the placement of their graduates. In this respect, the case institution needed to review the top-ranked other universities. The review of competitor institutions facilitated Case 1 to identify the necessity of adopting the'Outcome Based Education' (OBE) System, which was crucial for Case 1 to improve the quality of graduates, thereby preparing them for the job market (respondent 2 and 11). While case 1 realized that the traditional education system does not provide students with the necessary knowledge and skills which fulfill the performance expectations, the attempt to adopt OBE was to transform education into personalized learning through designing instruction models tailored to the learning preferences of students. In this respect, respondent 1 indicated:

> *"……many foreign institutions' [universities]"* Outcome Based Education System *"motivated us to introduce such a system. We were motivated to follow OBE to set clear stand- ards for the observable and measurable outcomes for our students.*

The respondent view suggests that one of the key reasons for focusing on OBE was to facilitate students with measurable skills and results. As expressed by respondent 3, along with the pressure from UGC, the competitors' success in increasing students effectiveness by adopting OBE was a motivation for case 1 to adopt such a system.

Further, the enhanced focus on increasing the rate of employability of its graduates, various industry relevant skills including adaptability skills, leadership skills, and public speaking skills were emphasized by case 1. However, the competitor institutions eventually motivated Case 1 to adopt practices including inviting experts and organizing study tours regularly. Consistent with the argument by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), the observance of successful organizations' QA practices resulted due to mimetic pressures, which encouraged organizations within an industry to adopt similar practices to gain legitimacy. Furthermore, it is revealed from the observations that while few high-performing local institutions provided high-quality education with well-equipped infrastructure, Case 1 eventually upgraded its campus facilities to maintain its market position.

According to respondent 8, Case 1 was inspired by the success of its competitors to create a well-equipped campus with amenities such as an 'open playground,' a' study space,' a 'cafeteria,' and a'modern auditorium.'A well-structured, highly equipped infrastructure was crucial for Case 1's success. In this respect, respondent 5 indicated:

> *"...the campus and facilities of peer institutions led us to es-*
> *tablish its permanent campus with attractive and contempo-*
> *rary modern facilities for the students, faculties, and staff.*

Moreover, while library facilities are considered as a key source for facilitating students' learning, Case 1 upgraded its library to one of the most modern libraries in Bangladesh in terms of wide collections, variety of services, modern technology, qualified manpower, user education, and service marketing. Respondent 8, mentioned that the adoption of a highly equipped library to produce better service was expected by Case 1's stakeholders.

Further, while Case 1 was aiming to enhance faculty quality and also to retain their highly qualified faculty members, directives from top management led to 'Study Leave' opportunity for young and willing faculty members to study abroad. The paid 'study leave' with an active service status was mentioned as a significant factor for faculty motivation and improvement. Respondents' view expressed that while there are only a few competitor institutions used to offer 'study leave' with pay, their success in creating faculty motivation was a pressure for Case 1 to adopt such practice. In this respect, participant 4 expressed:

> *…….. the study leave opportunity with pay was a motivation*
> *toward higher education….. indeed, it is a good strategy to*
> *encourage faculty members to return to the workplace. This*
> *was an appropriate decision taken by the top authority.*

4.3.3 Normative Pressures

Normative pressures were associated with top management support and training. The respondents and the review of the documents revealed that with support from top management, IQAC initiated faculty development programs to provide training to the faculty members. In addition, faculty members received external training and later provided training to other faculty members based on their work responsibilities. In this respect, respondent 3 expressed:

> *"... We encourage regular training on a variety of topics, such as teaching methods, research methodology, soft skills, and so on, in order to improve the performance of individual faculty members and students."*

However, the IQAC and Center for Research and Training (CRT) were found to organize training to encourage a promising Learning environment with effective support, thereby, contributing to quality teaching. More over, the increased quality concern gradually resulted in the top management of Case 1 inculcating a culture of continuous improvements. Accordingly, at the departmental level, various workshops and training have become a common practice. In addition, respondent 4 stated that "Departmental Development Committee" (DDC) and "Academic Committee" (AC) meetings are organized regularly by the department to discuss quality-related problems and initiate progress regarding quality practices. As revealed by the respondents, the support of top management, the Director of IQAC, and departmental heads of Case 1 played a key role in effectively communicating the need to adapt and upgrade QA practices in the institution. They develop and promote a culture of continuous improvement and use their experiences, skills, and knowledge (meeting minutes, observation).

However, the respondents' view indicates that the adoption, revision, and changes in the QA practices have changed stakeholders' satisfaction, including the students, guardians, employers, and regulatory bodies. While improved institutional outcomes, increased public image, and increased acceptance of this institution were found as key indicators of Case 1's effectiveness, the importance of internal processes was also mentioned by Case 1's management.

5. Conclusion

This paper investigated the influence of institutional pressures on the use of QA practices and the impact of QA practices on the effectiveness of higher

education institution. First, the qualitative study provided evidence on the extent and nature of QA practices.

Secondly, the study identified the influence of institutional pressures, including coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures on the use of QA practices. Thirdly, the study identified the impact of QA practices on enhancing the effectiveness of HEI in Bangladesh. The contributions of this study include: QA studies within the Quality Management (QM) literature and the literature on developing countries. This study develops a practical understanding of how the institutional environment influences the changes in the use of QA practices. Specifically, using the institutional theory, this study highlights the changes that were made to the QA practices of a HEI within a developing country. This study adds to the small body of literature by investigating the impact of institutional pressures on the adoption of various QA practices in case institution. The study also contributes to identifying the effectiveness of HEI within a developing country.

The findings showed that the changes or introduction of case institution's QA practices was the result of aninstitutional environment that was significantly influenced by factors including government and other stakeholders' pressures, top management, competition, and regulatory bodies. Hence, the result shows that the institutional environment led to the changes in QA practices in Case 1. Specifically, the case institutionbrought several changes in their QA practices to satisfy the requirements of the institutional environment and to gain legitimacy.

The institutional pressures facilitated Case 1 to point out its key shortfalls related to QA practices, thereby upgrading its academic standards including academic programs and academic content, the outcome of graduates in an attempt to satisfy its stakeholders. However, results showed that following the changes, Case 1 turned its focus more on quality-oriented objectives. The management of the institution found the necessity to focus on quality and QA practices became a routine practice. More importantly, QA practices were found as the source of greater outcomes for graduates, which finally led to a culture of continuous improvement within the case institution.

The study indicates that while the three institutional pressures, including coercive, mimetic, and normative, brought several changes in QA practices, the nature and intensity of the institutional pressures changed over the period of analysis. For example, while initially the extent and types of QA practices were at a minimum satisfactory level with simple QA practices, these changed over the course of time.

The pressures by the stakeholders', directives from top management, UGC, and BAC led to the emphasis on changes in quality required and resulted in a number of measures taken by Case1 including academic standards in terms ofacademic content and academic programs. Following that, changes were made to performance indicators for both teachers and students, including criteria for promotion and new appointments; student assessment process; admission criteria, classroom environment; inclusion of new departments and programs; Outcome-Based Education (OBE), research; and faculty development. Moreover, the requirements to comply with the national QA framework led Case 1 to establish IQAC. Moreover, the influence of BAC led Case 1 to prepare for accreditation.

The findings also demonstrate the increased level of competition as a source of mimetic pressure, with Case 1 imitating various QA practices such as Outcome-Based Education System (OBE); industry-focused curriculum; Interactive Learning Method; well-equipped campus with study space, modern cafeteria, playground, and modern library facilities. Moreover, normative pressures have influenced the adoption of QA practices for Case 1further through the introduction of quality training, workshops, and development programs and top management support. Results suggest that while the three pressures, including coercive, mimetic, and normative, were found to have an influence on the case institution, the nature of QA practices was different. The findings show that the changes in Case institution's QA practices were a planned and rationally executed endeavor. Faculty members and top management showed their critical involvement in the change process. Theirsignificant commitment and proper experience facilitated the case in identifying the right direction in respect to QA practices.

Moreover, results showed that the case institution observed various improvements in their performance. However, findings indicate that the key changes in performance indicators for case 1 include the increased number of employability, improved internal processes, increased satisfaction of the stakeholders, and increased institutional image.

There are some important implications for HE authorities operating in developing countries. First, the resultant changes observed by Case 1 will facilitate the authority of other HEIs to understand the necessity of adopting similar QA practices to improve the quality of their institutions. Second, the findings may help the HEIs of developing countries in identifying the key institutional pressures that led to changes in QA practices. These results may assist institutions to better predict the institutional pressures and their

resultant influence on QA adoption, thereby facilitating better adaptation to such pressures. Finally, while the current study focuses on QA practices in HEIs, the findings may provide HEIs an insight into how to adapt to institutional pressures to adopt other management practices.

6. Limitations and future directions

The study was conducted in one institution, particularly at the Business School, using the analysis of related documents and the data collected through interviews. Using a broader range of data, further research may be conducted by replicating the study's findings for different research sites. Although there was always a fundamental risk of missing valuable information, the researchers minimized the concern of reliability by using multiple data sources. Future research may use different data collection methods in response to minimize response bias. Finally, further study may be conducted to identify the influences of institutional pressures on other management practices.

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