EMBEDDEDNESS OF EMPLOYABILITY IN TERTIARY EDUCATION OF BANGLADESH: EXPLORING POLICY AND PRAXIS

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Abstract

While undergoing a neoliberal policy shift, Bangladeshi universities struggle to meet parents' and graduates' expectations of economic outcomes. The heavily debated mass expansion of universities conflicts with the classical goals of higher education and results in increasing inflation of unemployed graduates. Hence, it is essential to investigate the practitioners' awareness and the level of the policy's enactment in reality as per Ball's framework of policy enactment in educational institutions. This qualitative research aims to understand the policy's gaps and implementation better. In this regard, I interviewed sixteen high-level academics from the country's one of the oldest public universities due to their dual involvement in policy-making and execution. The results unveil concerning truths. The university lacks a definition of employability due to the issue never being debated as it is disregarded as a classical goal by academics. Consequently, faculty members take hold of career advising in a quasi-formal modality without students' career support services. The findings give birth to more thought-provoking questions, and initial policy recommendations are made to formalise employability development and address competitive advantages. This study will be of value to those involved with higher education policy-making and employability development.

Keywords: Employability; Higher education; Policy enactment

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 | Introduction

The issue of unemployment is deeply associated with higher education and could as well critically debated in the discourse of higher education and its outcomes (Lauder & Mayhew, 2020). Universities, as higher education institutions (HEI), being the last level of education for graduates, are criticised to carry the burden of producing employable human resources (Brown, et al., 2011). On the one hand, the universities are entitled to their classical goals and responsibilities as hosts of the independent knowledge generation process (McCowan, 2015). On the other, over time, the institutions have also evolved. in empowering their graduates with applicable knowledge, skills and attitude to help them earn a livelihood. States, parents and graduates invest in acquiring a higher degree from these institutes with an expectation of gaining positive economic returns.

Newly growing nations like Bangladesh, at their demographic dividend phase, have been investing in expanding HEIs with the hope of accommodating the growing number of youths, with a hope to prepare them as contributors to the national economy (Khatun & Saadat, 2020; Murshid, et al., 2019). But recent literature heavily debates the role of universities in Bangladesh, with significant investments by the state, in being unsuccessful to produce employable graduates (Chowdhury, 2020). Employers, on one hand, express their disappointment in the relevance of the graduates' skills (Kabir, 2020). On the other, academies keep questioning what and to what extent the universities should stretch their actions to focus on graduates' employability development along with their regular goals.

Bangladeshi public universities doubled in numbers during the past decades and are autonomous by the constitution (Kabir, 2013). At the same time, the institutions fall under legislations of multiple state-level and institutional policies and strategies. These policies have the characteristics of being influenced by international organisations' foreign policies and "good practices" (Kabir, 2020). Commentators also argue about this in their contextuality at times.

Along with all the debates and reasons in context, the number of educated unemployed youths has not stopped increasing. Contemporary literature in the context of Bangladesh lacks the mechanism of band connections between HEIs and policies (World Bank, 2013). In this condition, I am inclined to learn what the

universities can do to address the growing number of unemployed, graduates. I position myself as a researcher to understand examine and understand the better reason and current situation better by contributing to uncovering realities. As numbers and generalised statistical data available in the country are inadequate to answer critical questions on the universities' role in improving employability conditions. So naturally, I attempt to collect first-hand qualitative data on the issue, which can add to the evidence vacuum.

As explained later in the literature review chapter (chapter 2), I find the probable roles of the universities in educating and empowering graduates and elevating them to employment. At the same time, there are policies and strategic plans in action that guide the universities in this regard. Everything else in line, we do not hear from the silent stakeholders in this mechanism, the academics and the academic leaders. So, through this study, I attempt to establish communication a have direct with high-level academics, who have direct knowledge of the policy formulation and implementation process. Not having the privilege of longitudinal quantitative studies, I choose academies from one traditional and prime meritocratic university to learn from the academics' lived experiences regarding graduates' employability. In this process, I undergo in-depth interviews with academic leaders from almost all the existing disciplines of the university to ask about their perceptions and actions regarding the policies.

In this dissertation report, I compile the contemporary complexity between the state-level policies and the academics as policy actors. I take the help of supportive literature and theories to frame my queries in the second chapter, Literature Review. In the third chapter, I elaborate on the details of how I conduct and analyse the data I collect for my investigation. Subsequently, the fourth chapter holds the results and wide backed up by evidence I discuss and theorise the finding in the fifth chapter, and also mention the limitations and implications of this study. I use the sixth and the last chapter to summarise and close my discussion on this issue.

Chapter 2 | Literature Review

This chapter contains aims to identify what research has been done on graduate employability and other relevant issues. So, I present here the key definitions, concepts, theories, debates and gaps. First, I unfold how employability is related to higher education. Then I present the models that can be useful to define the university's responsibilities regarding employability. An important debate on if employability is the university's call is presented followingly. The next section contextualises employability policies and practices in Bangladesh. Finally, with the support of Ball's (2012)framework of policy enactment, I problematise and frame my key enquiries.

Higher Education, Employment and Unemployment

Universities as higher education institutions (HEI) have been considered pivotal change agents in development and economic growth during the past half-century. A broad range of literature dates back to Humboldt and Newman, describing universities as institutions for research and teaching. However, today, along with the inevitable philosophical, social and economic changes worldwide, universities transformed duly in structure, process, scopes, aims and functions. Expansion in quantity and functionality of universities has been observed (Tomlinson, 2017).

Regarding expansion in higher education (HE), commentators admit that the governments' adaptation of neo-liberal policies has viewed HEIs, specifically universities, as providers of higher qualified graduates (Brown, 2011). The view was also majorly influenced by the Human Capital Theory (Smith, 2002), which has posed a linear idea of bringing in more highly qualified people to the market to capitalise on them for economic growth. This idea of producing more human resources back-fired in many contexts as there was never the same number of employment opportunities created for all the graduates.

Nevertheless, academic discussions have found a rise in the unemployment rate in parallel to the operational expansion of universities. While many empirical studies point at the institutions and the graduates' capabilities of coping with the changing labour market, also referred to as "employability" (Gu, et al., 2018;

McCowan, 2015; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005), the others address the scarcity of adequate vacant positions for the graduates (Harvey, et al., 2002). However, universities continue to be scrutinised as they seemingly are suppliers of potential workers in the future workforce. Like all other crises, unemployment has a more substantial impact in less developed countries. This chapter will further concentrate in a due section on the case of Bangladesh as a developing nation, attempting hard to turn their economic conditions through neo-liberal adaptations and at the same time counting a higher number of unemployed graduates every year.

The 'Risks' of Unemployment

The demise of manufacturing industries and the emergence of the service sectors promote and demand individual skills instead of collective initiatives. Although derived from the global north, this reality is omnipresent for university graduates due to their inability to work in industrial sectors. This individualised phenomenon bypasses the unionised nature of employment and generates exclusion for most Furlong and Beck (2000). The second risk of unemployment observed by Olk (1988) is that individualisation makes the school-to-work transition unpredictable; on the other hand, it ensures that the conventional social reproduction process remains the same. More elaborately, the previously privileged part of the society transmits its capital to the next, the less-privileged part continues struggling, and social inequality prevails. Thirdly, Phillip Brown and colleagues explore global inequality becoming a process as it pushes the graduates into an unfortunate 'auction' in a market where they tend to sell themselves as products but at the lowest price (Brown, et al., 2011). With a huge supply of the number of graduates with similar qualities, their demand becomes less than expected due to limited job opportunities. So, the graduates, their parents and the state are disappointed due to the low return on their investment in higher education.

Investment and Return in Higher Education

In terms of investment and return, Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2018) explain that the transformed labour market has added another purpose - enhancing employability - to the HEIs. This newly added purpose made the clients (students and their parents) invest more in HE since the neo-liberal governments promote those investments in education to increase future productivity. Authors agree with the universities' additional responsibility, even if their works refer to various contexts (Lauder & Mayhew, 2020; Khatun & Saadat, 2020; McCowan, 2019; Tomlinson & Holmes, 2017; Brown, 2011).

There are ample policy-level interventions in evidence-based change-making in HE. Well-off countries and regions have been seen allotting a meaningful portion of their resources to address the issue of their unemployment crisis and find a data-driven way to tackle it. However, many developing and least developed countries (LDCs) lack research-driven data, and this absence is often detrimental to national or regional level decision-making. In a major study run in Sub-Saharan Africa, McCowan and colleagues (2018) have identified issues like the employers' dissatisfaction with the quality of the graduates and the lack of effective teaching-learning in the HEIs. However, data-driven remedial measures contribute positively in cases of dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, studies in Bangladesh have found a severe scarcity of available, usable, reliable and up-to-date data (Khatun and Sadat, 2021; Murshid, Mahmood and Shashi, 2019).

Defining Employability and Finding a Theoretical Model of Employability

A widely accepted definition of employability is discussed by Yorke (2006) states that employability is a set of achievements – skills, understanding and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in whatever occupation they wish to pursue. Harvey (2003), in a similar line with Yorke, explains that employability is not only about obtaining a professional position, as acquiring field-specific skills is not the only factor behind getting a job. Instead, the emphasis falls upon developing attributes in critical, reflective abilities that 'empower and enhance' the learner. Cole and Tibby (2013)

also affirm that employability is a lifelong process and is not limited to specific disciplines of knowledge. Instead, it is a university-wide idea to support students to become lifelong learners who can develop a range of knowledge, skill, behaviours, attributes and attitudes. Cole and Tibby (2013) also clarify that employability does not replace academic rigours and standards. Neither does it add more to the curricula, nor is it only about preparing students for employment. Employability is more of those attributes embedded in the university curricula that 'make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Knight & Yorke, 2004).

Harvey and others looked at employability as an attainment of the students/graduates. All the traits the students are required to obtain for acquiring a job and sustaining it have been placed at the core of learning. Harvey and others developed a model of *graduate employability development* to draw the image of the very complex process of 'employability' and 'employment'. The model shows that the HEI and the to-be graduates meet at the venue of 'employability development opportunities' where knowledge, skills and attitude of a particular discipline are acquired via pedagogy. At the same time, the to-be graduate is also reinforced with extra-curricular experiences, which contribute to the ultimate development of employability. Conversely, the employer administers the recruitment process where the graduate engages through articulation. The employment process is directly influenced by external factors like market demand and labour market goals (Harvey, 2003).

Harvey et al.'s model partially respond to the research of this study. McQuaid and Lindsay's employability framework contributed to this gap with a comprehensive detail of the 'individual', 'personal' and 'external' factors. The individual factors consist of 'employability skills and attributes, 'demographic characteristics', 'health and well-being, 'job seeking' and 'adaptability and mobility. The candidate's personal circumstances section is built up with 'household circumstances', 'work culture' and 'access to resources. Finally, the demand factors section contains the labour market factors, demand within the national economy, vacancy characteristics and other enabling support factors. To fit this detailed outline within

Harvey's model, I reclassified the factors of McQuaid's model into three sections: a. factors where the HEI can contribute directly and b. personal circumstances, and c. external factors. The original model elements were divided between internal and external factors (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). So, in the modified version, employability development opportunities within the HEI's catchment cover employability skills and attributes, 'health and well-being, 'job seeking', 'work culture' and 'access to social capital.

The interest in policy integration was missing from the theoretical discussion. Schneider and Ingram's studies on integrating policies within the institutional environment discuss some efficient policy tools or drivers. Their framework compiles five critical drivers for incorporating a policy- authority, incentives, capacity-building, symbolic and hortatory and learning. These drivers are essentially considered political phenomena and can be used in compliance, utilisation and other forms of co-production. Adapting from the policy tools, I identified the policy tools to address these problems at the academic unit level: **strategy and awareness building**, **monitoring and organisational learning**, **capacity building,** and **authority**, ranging from **voluntary actions** and permissions to **regulation** and **incentives** (Schneider & Ingram, 1990).

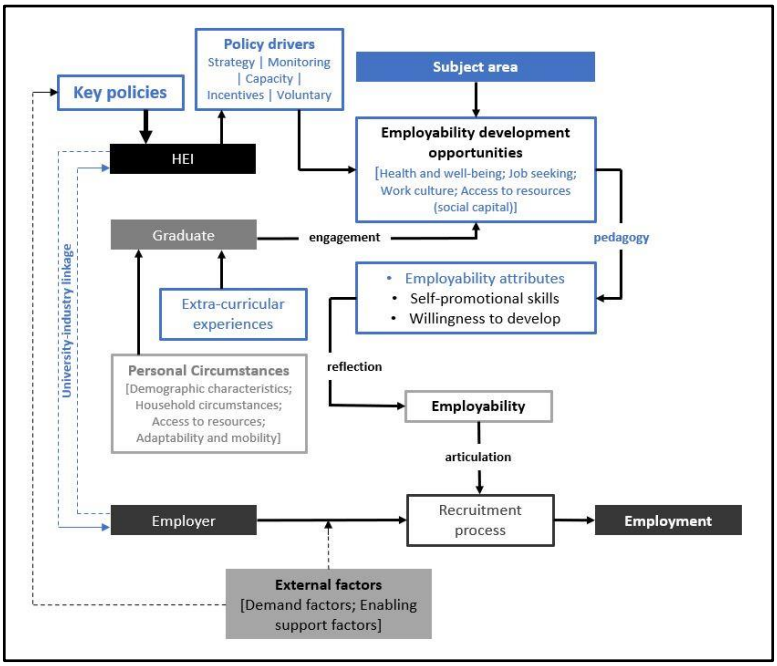

Figure 1: Factorial model of graduate employability

Is Employability the University's Call?

Both elite and newer universities have evidence of promoting employability as one of their performance indicators. While the most experienced ones are at the top of the global rankings, other universities are also putting a sincere effort to find a place in the race to record the most students securing employment. This is also given that 'employability' is not 'employment' but a trait of acquiring a secured income position. Moreover, commentators duly agree that changing socio-political agendas and public demands put employability at the heart of the functioning of universities. Along with this, one fundamental question arises: should universities promote employability?

To answer the question, McCowan (2015) wanted to begin with the emergence of Keynesian economies through the patronisation of Neo-liberal forces and the demise of the welfare systems. The government in a Keynesian system acts as more of a regulator rather than a provider and allows quasi-experimental markets to run the public services. In this way, the government is no longer responsible for the workers' employment but for the workers themselves. As employment becomes the workers' obligation, they must equip themselves with the necessary skills and attributes to adapt to the changing market. McCowan states-

> Instead of ensuring opportunities and welfare for all, the state is – in the name of fostering efficiency and economic competitiveness – allowing the wealthy to maintain their privileges and pass responsibility for disadvantage to the disadvantaged.

Swift (2003) argues it would be even more detrimental to reject any and every proposition of the capitalist systems because employment, thus, employability, is essential for the survival of the workers. It is required to balance so that the fashion of access to employability does not empower the empowered more and unhealthy competition of individual gain does not overpower aggregate benefits. So, collective benefits should be considered instead of reinforcing an unjust system by blindly following all neo-liberal agendas.

However, then again, what are universities built for? Collini (2012) responds to this vital question by referring to the transformation of universities. The subject focus of the 12th, 17th, 19th and 21st centuries are entirely different trajectories. Universities are now centres of human capital development (through teaching and learning) and technological innovation, but at least conceptually, they are also producers and developers of knowledge (Aviram, 1992). Collini defines 'extending human understanding through open-ended enquiry' as the core purpose of the universities.

Collini argues that, in this case, universities can either serve the intrinsic values only, adapt to any instrumental value demanded by society, or include some instrumental values that align with their original purpose. At the same time, Sen's (1992) remark indicates that learning will always have its external effect on activities with intrinsic intentions. So, it will not be possible for universities to function completely intrinsically. Simultaneously, addressing any social demand would hinder universities from their original mission. Since employability is a demand of the contemporary market-driven society and employability is directly related to the well-being of future graduates, universities should carefully consider fostering employability, keeping the danger of enhancing existing inequalities.

Employability can be included in the universities' purposes, but the institutions have every chance of compromising the quantity and quality of their limited resources and outcomes. Replacement of knowledge-generating modules from the curricula to include more modules on entrepreneurship and cross-cutting from the libraries to flourish career centres would be the opposite of serving the universities' purpose. Also, undivided attention towards employability to serve the market would completely divert the learners' relationship to knowledge with an overpowering emphasis on economic outcomes.

To summarise, universities, like other social institutions, have evolved in their due course based on the development and demand of society. However, a vital factor about universities is that they have also functioned as changemakers. The institutions can add, subtract and transform their goals and activities just as

organic beings undergo evolution. So, predefining the courses of the universities would be detrimental and invite inequality and justice.

The Face of Unemployment Among the Graduates in Bangladesh

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), 70.9 million young people aged 18-35 are unemployed globally (ILO, 2017). Bangladesh, at its demographic dividend stage, has also been undergoing a substantial level of unemployment among the youth (47%), as reported by the media. While looking at the country's National Labour Force Survey results, the national unemployment rate did not seem very high – only 4.2% of the population (BBS, 2017). The youth unemployment rate within the national unemployment is strikingly 79.6% (ibid.) However, Khatun and Sadat (2020) explored that a narrow definition of unemployment by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics also portrayed a 'disproportionately small unemployed population'. Also, confusion within the government bodies regarding defining the age range of the youth, involvement in the informal sector or in part-time positions, an extended period of seeking jobs and gender constraints were overlooked. According to the authors, it is more effective to utilise the 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) indicators to elaborate on educated youth unemployment.

Another contemporary work by Murshid and colleagues (2019) put a significant effort into identifying the actual nature of the educated unemployed population or, in other words, the unemployed graduates. What the authors found in their study is in line with the global trend- the probability of unemployment is higher in Bangladesh, with university degree achievers (35%) and just about half among higher secondary students. However, interestingly, graduates who have finally secured a job are also paid significantly higher than those who have lower levels of educational attainments. Employment status and earnings are highly intervened by age, gender, grades, institution, parental education, land ownership and location of the candidates.

Key Issues with Unemployment and Employability in Bangladesh

However, to glimpse the critical issues in the unemployment crisis, firstly, skill deficiency, quality education, skills mismatch and a frequent mention of ‘employability’ has been noticed in a range of literature on unemployment in Bangladesh. Even though there are debates on what quality education looks like, there are frustrations among employers regarding the graduates' knowledge, skills, abilities and qualities.

Another issue identified is the over-supply of liberal arts and science students from the universities, which in other words- very few graduates with specialised technical and technological skills. The interests among potential candidates have shifted towards the service sectors, whereas the country is reportedly becoming more dependent on employing experts from abroad to fill specialised positions. [reference from BIDS, p4]

Thirdly, the over-supply of graduates with generic skills has been supported by the government’s decision to mass expand HEIS – the number of public universities and enrolment in them has doubled over the last decade. The national statistics suggest that nearly a million students graduated from universities in 2017, and their population has an exponential growth rate of 15% yearly (UGC, 2019). So, the country's labour force supply appears much larger than the market's actual demand. Many have argued that the low capacity of the country’s universities creates inequality of access, thus creating discrimination, while others question the rationale of expansion at the cost of quality (WB, 2019). The emergence of many privately owned universities also added to the massification. Some private universities work on balancing the mission of a university and fulfilling the market demands, whereas the majority offer degrees with nearly no knowledge or skills in exchange for very high tuition fees.

Finally, researchers find that the universities are not agile enough to transform along with the fast-changing and diversified (somewhat unregulated) service sector and emerging industries. Although many commentators have previously argued that the universities should adapt to all the demands posed by society and the market, another dominant group showed that the universities had taken nominal innovative initiatives intrinsically. Many find this stagnation is due to the

high politicisation of academia (i.e., curricula, research, teaching), shutting down student unions and nearly no allotment for research funds or development libraries and student facilities. Some authors have also identified the state's (thus the universities') unwillingness to connect HEIs with emerging industries. As a result, many courses do not contribute to the discipline's development. Courses are also not concerned about the future graduates' employment. Careers centres are either inactive or non-existent in many faculties, even though commentators have opposed nurturing career centres at the cost of academic resources like libraries.

Policies and Strategies on Employability in Bangladesh

Looking at the policies and strategies implemented can help find the reasons behind the abovementioned state and issues of Bangladesh regarding graduate employment. Mentions of the National Education Policy (NEP), the Strategic Plan for Higher Education (SPHE), the National Jobs Strategy (NJS), the National Youth Policy (NYP), the National Labour Policy and the National Skills Policy (NSP) are relevant in the discussion. These policies and strategies clearly reflect the 7th Five Year Plan, which discusses developing strategies, policies and institutions to accelerate job creation and comply with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets.

Firstly, the critical interest of the NEP is to create valuable human resources for the country's economic growth. The policy does not shed light on which sector(s) to focus on for a certain period. Secondly, the SPHE, the overarching strategy paper for HE, focuses on increasing the enrolment rate in HE from 4.04% to 20% by 2026, with no specific plan for the job placement of future graduates. Also, SPHE has shifted domains from welfare modality towards private capitalist interest, which in every way can create obstacles for future graduates with a less-advantaged background. The plan lacks a projection about a curricular reform that will connect and place the graduates in their respective places. Instead presents a one-size-fits-all solution. Bangladesh has a long colonial history; the plan has just fed to sustain the old system through minor troubleshooting. Repetitive mentions of producing skilled humans with no hint of their next destination do not satisfy the scarcity of decent jobs. The universities' institutional freedom and

autonomy are often troubled by bureaucracy, political influence and state-supervised modality; SPHE will arguably keep feeding onto those agendas. As a notable outcome of the strategy paper, the Higher Education Quality Assurance Programme (HEQAP) crafted a Bangladesh National Qualifications Framework (BNQF), which can broaden future Bangladeshi graduates' opportunities in higher studies and employment abroad. Thirdly, the NJS begins with the unimpressive performance of Bangladesh to create decent jobs for eligible people regardless of the country's consistent economic growth. The strategy paper theoretically entails creating decent jobs and enhancing the agricultural and non-agricultural labour market and the private sector. The NEET group is concerned about this strategy, but the statistical data is unreliable and lower than the data generated in other studies. The NYP does not necessarily talk about the youth's employment; instead, this policy emphasises earning foreign remittance through the youths' involvement, enhancement of the readymade garments industry and vocational skills development. No major structural reform has been suggested in this policy.

Overall, this is evident that the policies of Bangladesh are significantly driven by the supranational and capitalist agendas (WB, 2019; ADB, 2012) Like other capitalist developing countries, employment and employability have been established as individualistic. Public or collective welfare is overlooked; thus, the universities are merely set accountable to the state to secure a carefully-devised pathway for the future graduates' external utility- employment.

Framing the Enquiry

An overview of the background, context and current conditions only intensify our many questions about the graduate unemployment crisis in Bangladesh. However, to have answers that have practical and implementational values, the inquiry must be framed analytically. In this regard, I borrow support from the works of Ball, Maguire, & Braun (2012). In their empirical grounded theory research, the authors indicate a framework of policy enactment that theoretically and practically identifies the reasons behind the gap between intended and actual policy outcomes. In the framework, the authors mainly argue that the outcomes, in reality, differ

significantly from the intended outcomes declared in the policies due to how they are interpreted and implemented by the actors or practitioners.

The first distance occurs when the practitioners comprehend the intended policy differently due to contextual and institutional differences. Understanding why parts of the policy are conveyed as intended and why some areas are different can be the first step to finding a way to mitigate the gaps. To elaborate, Ball, in his other works, also emphasises the level of awareness of the practitioners regarding the policy about to implement. The contrast in the policy interpretations can be counted as an area where specific recommendations for modifications can be made.

The authors consider that critically looking at the process and means of enacting the policy is heavily impacted by the interpretation and the contextual reality. Also, the level of enactment can be explained by analysing the similarities and differences between the expected and observed reality of the outcomes. Secondly, the practitioners' performance in implementation with a varied understanding coupled with multiple situational complexities results in unexpected outcomes.

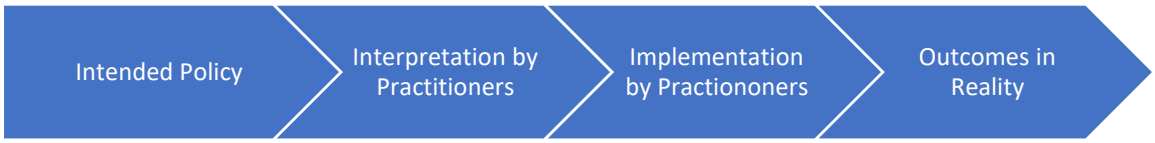

Figure 2: Ball's (2012) Framework of Policy Enactment

Ball's framework (2012) has been well accepted, argued and critically discussed in other commentators' works but has been duly considered an undeniable contribution to the understanding of policy enactment research. Context, policy borrowing, micro-level political complexity, institutional awareness, and onto-epistemological contribution are the key arguments in this framework.

The authors who supported Ball (2011, 2012) discussed considering the context where the policy will be interpreted and moulding accordingly. Mampaey (2018) noted that universities might interpret, replicate, omit and add to the policies even though they are bound to operate in uniformity. Singh, Thomas and Harris (2013) also emphasise that *re-contextualisation* of the policy before implementation is a

complex yet necessary process, and the *to whom, when, where, why* and *how* (Bernstein, 1990) of the policy in action policy should be demystified to the actors. In a similar line, Werts et al. (2013), Chase (2016) and Lambert and Penney (2020) put a significant load on the shoulders of the state to ensure homogeneousness in the understandability of the policy by taking the social complexity into account. It must be admitted that higher education institutions are unique and complex social organisms, and each university is meant to implement the policy differently. It would be interesting to spectate why different institutions act differently from a researcher's perspective.

To utilise Ball's (2012) framework in the context of Bangladesh, it is essential to discuss policy borrowing. The country, like many others, has been adapting the international neoliberal influence and resulting in borrowing foreign policies. As Ball (2011, 2012) did not require bringing the policy adaptation issue to the table, it should be helpful to look at what commentators added to the framework afterwards. Steiner-Khamsi (2014) explored the phenomenon of *resistance* among practitioners while reading the translation of an adapted international policy in enactment. Sin (2014) and Burdett and O'Donnell (2016) problematise the dangers of misreading policy borrowing from international suggestions, oversimplifying and overlooking the varied characteristics of entirely different contexts. Borrowed policies also tend to discriminate and exclude the non-elite in academia. Thus, the *autonomy* and *sensitivity* of the actors are to be considered (Peruzzo, 2022). Baleriola et al. (2021) go one step further to find a solution for Chilean policies reversing neoliberal influences through utilising *Action-Network Theory* to understand policy translation.

Although in a very different context, the recent policy enactment study by Innes (2022), duly written with the support of Bourdieu (1977) and Ball (2011), ensures the existence of dominant micro-politics in education institutions during the enactment of a policy. However, in Innes' (2022) work, since the plot of the study was primary school, it was possible to suggest reducing the autonomy of the practitioners, which is not the case in our study. So, while attempting to understand what can be done by the institution to meet the policy goals, it is also critical to

consider the whole grassroots level complexities of the institution to measure how distant the outcomes are from the intended goal.

However, a useful but unexpected finding was caught while testing the validity of using Ball's (2012) framework for this research through other authors' lenses. Several research projects targeted mid-level professionals and practitioners in education institutions as key informants. The practitioners, connecting with the policy level and the beneficiaries, fall in a suitable professional position to respond to interpretation and implementation.

The existing literature covers a vast area and explains many critical ideas. However, still, there are some key knowledge gaps. The reviewed papers highlight the policy perspective while discussing policy interpretation, but quite misses the practitioners' perspective, which might help us get closer to the phenomena. Similarly, it is also vital to know better how the actors perceive their understanding of accountability in interpreting and implementing policies. Due to contextual differences, not many studies have found the variedness in the ways of enactment and the reasons behind their variedness. Ball's (2012) framework of policy enactment is applicable in diverse empirical territories due to its openness and flexibility. However, one major criticism suggests that the framework focuses more on practical application than theoretical and epistemological implications. This dissertation, parallel to Ball, intends to understand the actors' lived experiences. So, in the name of remaining neutral, the research somewhat suffers the cruelty of being judged through foreign theoretical lenses. Following his study and keeping in mind the contextual complexity, I use the following questions to guide me through the enquiry:

i. How differently do the practitioners interpret the employability policy goals?
ii. How varied are the practitioners' reactions while enacting policy clauses involving employability?

Chapter 3 | Methodology

Introduction to the project and the research questions

While undergoing its demographic dividend stage, Bangladesh faces a rising unemployment rate among educated youth (Khatun & Saadat, 2020; Murshid, Mahmood, & Shashi, 2019). A significant portion of the unemployed youth (79%) are university graduates who fall under the "not in education, employment or training" (NEET) group (Rahman, Farooq, & Selim, 2021; World Bank, 2013). Some researchers refer to the mass expansion of universities and high enrolment rates with compromised education quality that leave the graduates with mismatched knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward the 'market' (Murshid, et al., 2019). Other commentators ask if the university's sole duty is to focus on the future graduates' employability (McCowan, 2015). This research will explore the university's position to understand whether, how and why a major public university in Bangladesh is undergoing a particular pattern of policy measures regarding graduate employability. The study looks forward to understanding the relocated power relations involved within the intrinsic policy stand-points of the university through the following questions:

i. How differently do the practitioners interpret the employability policy goals?
ii. How varied are the practitioners' reactions while enacting policy clauses involving employability?

The methodological strategy of the study

This study follows the qualitative method due to the dominance of qualitative data. The study will explore policy dimensions, decisions, implications, and the relevant 'why's and 'how's. So, the study will throw open-ended inquiries and expect a vast range of responses. I try to understand the complex and compound socio-political phenomena regarding employability at a public university in Bangladesh. Ontologically, the study will capture the multiple realities of the context within the university. The study's epistemological contributions admit that open-ended data

collected from humans are context-oriented. The study will add a multitude of understandings of employability and the university's role in it.

Primarily the research will dissect some key policy documents. Then, the researcher engages in conversations with key informants who significantly influence the formulation and implementation of the university's intrinsic policies. Live human conversation helps the researcher grow a more profound and broader knowledge of the complex context and leaves further scopes to explore beyond the initial research questions.

This research does not intend to collect a vast amount of quantitative data. Instead, it gathers in-depth qualitative discourse within a limited time and production length. The study site of the research is a prime, meritocratic university in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The first key reason to select this institution is that the university has the oldest higher education records in the country, with the most significant number of students graduating every year. Secondly, being the alma mater of the researcher, this university is more accessible in terms of data collection. So, there is a purposive and convenient element in selecting this institution. No other institutions have been selected as research sites.

The key informants of this study are heads of academic units (Deans), senior faculty members and policy-makers, who are 16 in number. To investigate the university's academic units, 6 out of the 13 faculties and 2 out of the ten research institutes have been selected. So, eight heads of academic units will be talked with. The academic heads are expected to provide their opinions comprising policy, administrative and teaching perspectives. Moreover, eight senior faculty members will also be responding to the interview to receive a more classroom and student-oriented set of discourse. The length of the core part of each interview will not exceed 45 minutes, excluding the brief introduction of the participants, their respective profiles and responsibilities.

Data collection method

I collected empirical data for this research mainly through in-depth interviews with high-level university academics who belong to policy and implementation trajectories. I use semi-structured in-depth interview schedules on online conference calls. The standard procedure of ethical permissions was undertaken to collect data through the interviews, which I elaborate on in this chapter.

The instrument of data collection was constructed on seven major themes. The themes comprise the respondent's role/responsibilities in the university, awareness of employability strategy, institutional efforts, incentives, capacity development, student activism and future priorities. The themes were based on a university's role in enhancing employability identified in the model by Harvey, Locke, & Morey (2002). The instrument had the primary probing questions against respective themes. The core tool was built in English, but later, before data collection, the questions were translated into Bangla, the local medium of instruction.

The instrument was primarily tried with two faculty members to assess the fluency, coherence, administrability, maxims (e.g., easy to challenging) and connection with the research goal. After two trials, a few questions were added to a few themes. The sequence of the questions could not be followed in all the interviews and was altered multiple times. The modified questions connected national and institutional policy with curricular, co-curricular, internship and career services. The final draft of the interview schedule had a last critical question on whether employability-focused activities affect the original goals of the university.

The preliminary plan to connect with potential informants was to establish email/telephone communication with them sourced from the university's academic staff directory. However, some of the academic leaders/deans were changed or were on leave which was not updated in the directory. Significant support was provided in this regard by my contact at the university, performing as a mid-level academic staff. By confirming the respondents' long list, I deployed telephone calls and WhatsApp messages to gain an appointment. If no replies were received, I emailed them to their official addresses from my University of Glasgow email. Most potential informants replied, a few ignored and a few rejected.

I took appointments of the respondents upon their oral or email confirmation for the interview following their local time. Consent forms, calendar notifications and meeting links were also sent upon confirmation. Fourteen interviews were carried out on the Zoom platform, and the rest on WhatsApp video calls. Oral permission to record was taken before starting the interviews. Zoom has its recording options. The WhatsApp call was joined from the desktop version, and the calls were recorded via Camtasia Pro. Most of the calls were recorded in good quality, whereas three confronted network errors and parts of the recordings were disrupted. All the questions could be asked during data collection except for two-one professor ignored to answer one question due to his doubt about criticising governmental decisions. Another dean reconfirmed complete anonymity and non-verbatim scripture of his speech.

Adapting the strategy to the ongoing pandemic

With the COVID-19 pandemic being the critical concern of the current situation, many new scenarios arose that previous academic research projects did not face. Firstly, travelling to the research sites was highly impeded due to extended and expensive quarantine periods while travelling, lockdowns, and travel bans. Secondly, the parties' health concerns, the respondents and the researchers were considered to be at risk of being infected and/or contributing to spreading the virus. Thirdly, even after managing travelling and ensuring the highest possible health safety measures, the time constraints of research projects would have been hampered. So, to meet the research goal and adapt to the pandemic situation, it was decided to collect the data online so that there are no travel issues, no health concerns and comparatively fewer time constraints.

Moreover, an alternative possibility would be to find the answers to the questions by analysing secondary data. However, not many up-to-date, accurate and ample data were found, which has been discussed in the literature review chapter. Another possibility of this project could have been dissecting only the policy documents, which would help the researcher avoid human contact. However, while reviewing the literature, it was found that the dissection of key policies and

strategies does not answer the questions directly. So, data was collected through online interviews. Health concerns of meeting in person were avoided entirely due to the current pandemic. Secondly, time constraints of travelling did not allow the researcher to reach the selected number of respondents. Also, this study took advantage of technology in recording the interview with the informants' prior consent, which would have been difficult while recording and note-taking during in-person interviews.

Access to the field

My previous academic supervisor, a faculty member of the research site, was supportive enough to establish primary communication with the high-level academics of the institution. After introducing the respondents, a mix of telephone conversations and email communications was utilised to proceed with their permission. Some academics spontaneously agreed to participate in the study, while others could not confirm their schedule and could not manage time for the interviews. A nominal number of faculty members were not interested in joining the conversations. Sadly, I faced an irreparable loss from one of the academics who confirmed to attend the interview and faced an untimely demise. Some of the communications were established passively through secretaries/assistants of the respondent, which resulted in either delayed or negative responses. Per the university's regulations, I did not have to take prior permission from the institutional authority to reach the respondents.

Obstacles in the field

Even though access to the respondents was managed, matching the schedules for the interviews within the research timeline became a challenge. Not all informants who agreed to participate in the research could approve an appointment within the regular schedule. Secondly, some high-level academics were in retirement or about to be relocated from their respective positions required for the research. However, they were still interviewed due to their experience in

the recent past. Thirdly, some of the informants stepped back during the interview due to some segments questioning policy failures which they suspected put them in political controversies. The fourth complication arose with the interviewees enquiring deeper details about the project. Some of them were satisfied with a one-page synopsis of the project. Others negated to join the interview passively. Lastly, two technical difficulties appeared while taking the interview: one is frequent switching of code, and the other is a set of common technological issues. Frequently switching between English and Bangla made the transcription quite tricky. Otherwise, frequent disconnections of the internet and hardware connectivity issues were observed.

Contingency: gaining access and overcoming obstacles

Not all the potential informants participated in the study. There always are drop-outs, respondents who deny at some point, and some who fall into system losses. So, my original plan was to reach out to three times the respondents I needed to fulfil the determined requirements of the study. My initial communication consisted of 45 potential academics, among whom 24 confirmed via email that they were interested in going through the formal conversation and signing an official consent form. I had to ensure to take interviews of at least 16 academics, and I have kept eight excesses just in case a few faculty members cannot join. Secondly, time became crucial as I had to coordinate between finalising the research design, communicating with potential respondents, applying for ethical approval from my host university and ultimately collecting data in the field. Regardless of the efforts, this plan did not succeed as many interviewees are yet to be questioned. Changing the modality of the interviews from in-person to online took place early, which is the best possible method considering the travel and health hazards. Thirdly, in the question of public good, some questions and arguments fail to remain neutral as they point toward loopholes in central policies. It was not considered that some academics would count this as criticising the government initiatives that might bring them under political contradiction. They were reassured to have their identity fully anonymised, which relieved most of them. Lastly, technological issues were enlisted in the original plan, time was allotted flexibly, and room for rescheduling

was also kept. However, hardware issues were variables I did not have control over, yet some respondents were supported to troubleshoot the issues over the phone.

Philosophical Standpoint

The ontological perspective of this research lies under the structural realism trajectory due to its nature of relying on a scientific theoretical lens, but the reality being investigated remains uncertain before finding (Crotty, 1998). The results are expected to convey more practical implications, and the epistemological contribution of this study belongs to the constructivist area for hosting an interplay between subjectivity and objectivity (Moon & Blackman, 2014). In line with the onto-epistemological viewpoint. The theoretical perspective of this study operates to interpret and understand the *culturally and historically situated* reality (Crotty, 1998; Cohen, et al., 2018). The interpretive tendency of this study duly connects to the phenomenological method to look into the lived experiences of the subjects whom the researcher stays separated from (Alase, 2017).

Data analysis plan

I follow the ‘interpretative phenomenological analysis’ (IPA) as guided by Moustaka (1994) and Smith et al. (2009) as I identify this research as a qualitative interpretative analysing study. The key reason behind choosing IPA as my method is that I am attempting to get closer to the root policy cause(s) of the graduates' reduced employability, regardless of the mass expansion of HE. Through this research, I try to understand better the dilemma between perception and conception of the university’s role in considering employability as an institutional goal and power relations' underlying intentionality, intuition, and intersubjectivity. In academic arguments, my inquiry analysis discreetly falls under the characteristics of narrative analysis. However, the step-by-step guide of the IPA would standardise my analysis and increase the accuracy (Alase, 2017; Noon, 2018).

The IPA is a widely used standardised method of analysing data acquired through in-depth or semi-structured interviews. The interviews are frequently described as “conversations with a purpose”. Once completed, they are recorded verbatim and transcribed (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57). The developers of IPA advocate for researchers to return to the interview data as needed during the flexible and dynamic data analysis process and focus on meanings throughout the analysis process (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Although there is no official way to do IPA, the IPA creators provide a functional seven-step data analysis approach (Smith et al., 2009). Figure 3 below depicts the conceptual structure of this seven-step guide. This study will majorly instrumentalise the seven-step process.

Figure 3: Data analysis framework (Charlick, et al., 2016 adapted from Smith et al., 2009)

As encouraged by Creswell (2013), while analysing qualitative data with the IPA method, researchers have been suggested to separate their perception and conception from the ‘lived experiences of the informants. Also, before analysis, “a list of non-repetitive non-overlapping statements” on the phenomenon was suggested. Each of the statements can function as a grouping label.

Consequently, after grouping the significant statements to form a large unit of information, I write a textural description of “what” the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon. The textural description of “what” will eventually lead me to write a structural description of “how” the respondent acquired his/her experience on the phenomena. Then a merged description of both the “what” and the “how” is expected to explore the essence of those experiences amalgamated.

Data analysis

Upon the end of data collection, I intended to use artificial intelligence to initiate faster transcription. AmberScript refused me due to Bangla being absent from their list of services. I looked into Google Cloud analytics and eventually faced disappointment due to their engine being unable to capture fast-paced Bangla audio. Finally, after failing with Google's speech-to-text functionalities, I took refuge in the manual transcription process, which could have saved more time in the first place.

Except for a few disruptions due to network errors, while recording, the transcription was a straightforward process. The Bangla conversations to have been written in dialogue writing format, but segments spoken in English were also kept in English. Inaudible and confused areas were marked, and natural fillers were kept intact. After Completing each inter transcription, repeated words/phrases/expressions were deleted. Spelling errors and punctuation were also corrected.

I acquired a standard license of NVIVO 12 from the University of Glasgow, and I use it to analyse the data. The software becomes instrumental for me in taking notes while reading and re-reading the transcripts. The note-taking process allows me to develop labelled nodes and sub-nodes, which produce emergent themes, themes I classify the micro and attempt to find thematic patterns before the data is ready to be interpreted.

The interpretation mostly begins making sense while data themes are moulded under the analytical framework by Ball (2012). However, before anchoring with the

help of Ball, the data interpretation appeared quite distorted, ward subjective and politically biased. Finally, before reporting the results, I select quotations to place. They are in the moulded outline. The quotations also need to be translated into English and paraphrased.

The Researcher's Positionality

The connection with this study has grown over time through my academic, professional and personal journey. Firstly, my first university degree focused on curriculum and instructional technology and I looked into building an effective objective-based curriculum for tertiary education. This investigation led me to evidence that exposed the distorted connection of higher education with employment. Then, during my placement in entry-level positions in the service sector, I was overwhelmed by experiencing the intensity of competition, skills mismatch, refusals and the state's indifference to employing graduates. Later, in my personal journey as a researcher in making, I attempted to clarify my understanding of ascertaining a functional map of education to work in my context of origin. Now, I take advantage of access to expert guidance and adequate resources in this international master's programme focusing on the political economy of education to undertake this research.

Ethical Consideration

This research has obtained the approval of the Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow through participating in a comprehensive and formal process of ensured ethical consideration. The research falls under a low level of ethical risk due to being conducted via online audio-visual communication. The approval system confirms full anonymity, confidentiality and safe storage of the data collected from the institution(s) and personnel. Oral and written consents were taken from the adult participants, and there were no humans contacted under the age of 18. Health safety and the protection of vulnerable groups were maintained as default measures. The ethics application faced a round of correction in one of the consent forms from the committee, which was duly addressed.

Chapter 4 | Analysis and Results

Introduction

Following the global phenomenon, modern-day universities in South-East Asia have been operating under neoliberal policies (Khatun and Saadat 2020; Kabir 2020). Criticisms suggest that the institutions are slowly moving away from their original goal of facilitating independent enquiry (Kabir 2020; Murshid, Mahmood and Shashi 2019). On the one hand, governments and parents invest a significant portion in higher education, hoping the youth will gain an economic return when they graduate (Murshid, Mahmood and Shashi, 2019). On the other hand, the employers reportedly blame the universities for not being able to supply graduates equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills (Rahman, Farooq and Selim 2021; Chowdhury 2020). Both-way pressure and controversies intensify when the mass expansion of universities occurs and increases the inflation of graduates, followed by a rising unemployment rate (Murshid, Mahmood and Shashi 2019).

In growing economies like Bangladesh, universities have reportedly failed to fulfil both the classically accepted and the heavily debated neoliberal higher education goals (Naher 2018). The universities in Bangladesh have recently undergone a policy reform, namely the Strategic Plan for Higher Education (SPHE) 2018-30, which is, by many critics, a depiction of neoliberal adaptation. The policy addresses the graduate unemployment problem by embedding employability in academic culture. Enactment of the policy gives birth to a vital question: can universities contribute to reducing the increasing rate of unemployed graduates?

In this regard, I take the guidance of Ball's (2012) framework for enacting policies in educational institutions. Although empirical data of the Ball's (2012) study concentrates on secondary schools, the critical interests of the study fall in line with this research's intention: understanding policy and practice. Ball (2012) suggests that examining the enactment of the policy has two prior stages: the interpretation of practitioners and the translation of their understandings. Having a deeper comprehension of the variedness and the gaps between the policy, its interpretations and its translations among the practitioners can contribute to

determining how the gaps, if any, can further be mitigated. So, following Ball's (2012) study, I used the following questions to guide me through the enquiry:

i. How differently do the practitioners interpret the employability policy goals?
ii. How varied are the practitioners' reactions while enacting policy clauses involving employability?

To execute the enquiry, I took the help of semi-structured in-depth interviews with high-level academics of the case university in Bangladesh. Elaborating on the essential enquiries, I will structure this chapter of findings in a capturable format. So, firstly, the findings organise different interpretations of academic practitioners from different faculties. The interpretations are elaborated on the level of awareness, contrasting interpretations and exploring factors behind similar and different understandings of employability clauses in the policy. The second section of the findings contains the level of enactment, ways of enactment and why practitioners have varied reactions while implementing an overarching policy at the institutional level. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings as a concluding remark.

Interpretation of the Policy

Academics interviewed expressed multifaceted opinions on their interpretation of the policies. The significant highlights of their inputs focus on unclear policy guidelines, the inability to identify employability as a goal, and the undefined accountability of the academic staff.

A sincere concern for the high-level academics of the university is unclear policy guidelines on employability at the national and institutional levels. A respective academic head of a prominent faculty expresses a tone of frustration about not having an available policy that can guide academia to foster employability in academic culture. Secondly, multiple professor-level respondents critically discuss that departments are still in the dark regarding setting a goal for the degrees they offer due to unclear strategies being conveyed to them. In the words of one academic

> “There is no transparent direction of how many students are to be instructed by a faculty, and which subject to lead where in profession… the university is suffering from an overall inability to exercise and produce knowledge systematically which is also affecting the employable attributes of its learners.” (AP2)

Multiple academics identify employability as one of the critical goals of higher education. However, one professor brings in the dilemma of university autonomy and waiting for central guidelines simultaneously. By the founding order, the institution has complete freedom to formulate its vision and work plan. Even after that, it never envisioned the relevance of university in the employment market, instead waiting for a national-level direction to align—a tendency to be dependent restrained the university from developing individualism in addressing pressing issues. A professor from another department of the same faculty points toward political connections as factors of the faculty members’ professional promotion rather than service to the students’ welfare (CP1). In other parts of their opinion, a faulty monitoring system, lack of accountability, and limited infrastructure are confounding factors.

Upon being asked about the university’s accountability on improving employability, a dean states, “Can a university today operate only to create knowledge? And what is the creation of knowledge aimed towards? If the creation of knowledge does not facilitate livelihood, what use is the knowledge for?” (DP2) Another professor addresses the parents' expectations who invest a significant amount of investment in ensuring their wards’ quality higher education (CP1). The professor agrees that meeting the parents’ expectations is necessary to maintain the relevant existence of the university as a social institution. However, even after supporting this awareness, another professor goes back to the long list of service responsibilities that hinder them from focusing on ensuring academic excellence. To quote the professor:

> “On one hand, I teach about three courses per semester and supervise some research students. On the other hand, there are responsibilities which are not even distantly academic. A professor is a member of 26 committees that execute administrative and governance-related issues. Yes, I am

> responsible for contributing to institutional policy development, but at the same time overly burdened with non-academic tasks." (CP3)

One of the key reasons behind the confusion is the policies in 'enactment' are heavily influenced by guidelines of international organisations and lack contextual justifications. According to the respondents, a second factor behind blind replication is that policymakers do not prioritise higher education policies. A tug of war between university autonomy and political direction has been ubiquitous, which resulted in the university not finding its academic vision. As per the explanation of one academic, never bringing the university's goals and objectives into academic debates caused a stagnant situation and losing individuality.

Factors behind interpretation gap

The interviews reveal crucial insights into why interpretations differed between academics and policies. Employability is never being debated within academia; the key discussant factors are the confusion of hampering academic freedom and the absence of a discipline-based job market.

A dean's remarks give the 'never-debated' problem of employability another parallel perspective:

> "A reason behind not being able to formulate how the educational exercise should be is because of the lack of study holistically defining the employment sectors of the country. We have not debated the existing sectors' competitive advantages or endemic growth. We have been discussing the prospects of the 'third sector for the past twenty years but never argued academically if the third sectors are what we are labelling them anyway! So, we never pragmatically considered what expertise we need and where universities can contribute." (DP2)

Opinions of academics differ from the existing policy guidelines as respondents felt that embedding employability in university culture negatively influences academic freedom. Even though the university runs under full autonomy, a tension of centralised directives is still omnipresent in the policy mechanism. Since guidance from the SPHE 2030 is a strategic plan from a central authority, there is

resistance among faculty members belonging to the school of thought to exercising teaching and research as the only goals of higher education. The professor later explains that a policy out of context imposed on the university makes the academic environment challenging. Academics begin suspecting classrooms as training centres, and economic benefits become more critical over classroom contents to the learners.

In a matching line with the academic freedom issue, the de-democratisation of the power structure in an autonomous institution makes academics question the validity of enacting a central policy. One of the professors stated: “The Vice-Chancellor holds the sole executive power in the university, and the VC office is not accountable to any of the stakeholders (CP1).” This indicates that the party in power can make the VC take specific policy measures against public demand.

The creation of a discipline-based job market was overlooked at the policy level; thus, unnaturally immense pressure is upon the govt executive positions. The development of potentially relevant markets was not discussed and debated, hence, overlooked at the policy level. As a result, apart from some disciplines, most departments face deprivation and disconnection from their probable job fields. Without this information, students from most departments lose interest in exploring respective discipline-relevant jobs and become severely inclined towards a secured government job. So, the students’ demand against the question of employability remains in support of government jobs. Moreover, the university can neither establish a sustainable connection with the market nor can it support the students to fulfil their desires.

Reaction to the policy

While discussing the extent and means of enacting the existing policy, the academics talked about curriculum integration, unassessed market needs and ineffective internship programmes.

The level of enactment in embedding employability in academic culture hardly reaches its beneficiaries, the students, through a challenging trickling down process. The curriculum through which the employable competencies are

supposed to travel to the students has begun going through a rearrangement of contents and a few additions. However, according to academics, the restructuring is not a reform but instead moulding the former syllabi into an objective-based format. One professor comments, "This cannot be called a transformation to integrate employable attributes. I am restructuring the existing content into a scientific format, but it is not evaluated if the new form of the curriculum addresses employability pragmatically or practically (P1)." Another professor elaborates: "Integrating a cross-disciplinary mechanism can help the students avoid the current rigidity and broaden their paths to choose between the skills they need. However, the university is still not in the position to implement minor courses in their curriculum (CP1)."

Throughout the conversations with members of different faculties, it has been eminent that there are clear distinctions between the characteristics of different faculties in terms of embedding employability. One faculty have been seen as proactive in minimising the number of unemployed graduates, while other faculties have been discovered to be indifferent to addressing future graduates' employment and putting it on the academic agenda. In the words of a professor,

> "If I am allowed to comment which faculty or subject has done very well suiting the market's need, as far as university orientation, I will first name Business Studies. Traditionally called Management, Commerce or Banking, they have coexisted between the private sectors and university education. The financial sectors need graduates from the university. They are well-bridged." (CP3)

Contrasting experiences with other faculties appear like:

> "The perception of the employers and policymakers are not being sensitised for other disciplines in the private service sector. Needs are left unassessed… For example, when there was a boom in NGOs in Bangladesh in the '80s and the '90s, there was a demand for sociology and public administration graduates. However, now the demand is no more, and those degrees alone do not suffice the prerequisites of those sectors. So, these disciplines are being left behind in employing their graduates." (P1)

Internships have been enacted in the lion's share of departments. However, mixed reactions to internships are observed. One of the Associate Professors' opinions is that internship programmes are kept in the curricula to fulfil credit hours. The quality, placement and objectives of the internships are overlooked. The faculty thinks that internship programmes can play vital roles in creating future employment opportunities through having a formative in-depth understanding of how the respective industry works. To quote the Professor, "…No matter how much payment he gets, but if he could gain the knowledge and experience, how and why? What is the culture of an organisation? It will help their future employability (CP2)." It can also contribute to enhancing the learners' skills in academic research. Also, another faculty member thinks that what advantage can be acquired from an internship/apprenticeship programme seriously depends on the candidate's intentions. Many candidates are so focused on acquiring a superior government position that exploring the internship loses its priority initially.

Factors behind enactment gap

The enactment situations stated above can be explained with further discussions regarding implementing policies.

Firstly, there is a constant dilemma between central policy directions and institutional autonomy. On the one hand, the university heavily depends on centralised directives to enact measures. The significant decisions come from the party in power. However, the policies produced by the government are majorly influenced by recipes provided by international organisations and standards. Hence, the national policies severely lack empirical data and contextuality patronage. At the same time, this lack critically questions the government's bona fide concern to envision future graduates' economic benefit. On the other hand, the university enjoys faculty-level autonomy by the law, which connotes that the faculties do not have to wait for government policies to implement initiatives that help the graduates stay relevant in the market.

Secondly, empirical contextual data was absent in making the policy and strategies. The formulation of the central directives are replications of international data. So, considering the national complexity is not the case for the policies, which makes the directions unclear and irrelevant in many ways while going into enactment. A long-term tangible national vision is also unavailable, which disconnects stakeholders.

Thirdly, empirical and comparative research was not attempted to verify the contextual benefits of the policies implemented at the institutional level. Most academics think that is due to unwillingness to upset the existing structure within the institution and with the government. The academia, in this way, missed the chance to challenge and correct the national-level propositions.

Concluding remarks

One of the critical reasons that the enactment process became unprioritised is the lack of collective and personal level accountability. Also, establishing this fact takes the conversation into a loop where the culture of accountability is dependent on successful policy enactment, and successful policy implementation relies on the stakeholders' accountability. Academics identify a deficiency of resources and inadequacy of infrastructures (e.g., large class size and absence of career centres and student advising units) to take further initiatives on employability. This is true that the institution largely relies on government subsidies and funding. However, even after possessing access to exercise complete autonomy, the institutional policy never reflected on becoming self-sufficient. Although, there are examples of faculties raising their funds through academic programmes relevant to the market. Finally, one specific faculty succeeding not only in mitigating graduate unemployment in their faculty but also becoming self-sufficient resource-wise is their direct relevance to the market. Academics from within and outside the faculty admit to acquiring this competitive advantage by adopting a global curriculum regardless of the criticism of uncontextualized incorporation.

Chapter 5 | Discussion

Introduction

The rising graduate rate and unemployment rate during the demographic dividend phase of Bangladesh are addressed as the core issue in this research. Expectations and outcomes between the state, graduates, parents and employers have not been reported to meet each other in the neo-liberal policy shift that the country is adapting to. This research aims to investigate the university's position in improving employability conditions.

The chosen university, my research site in Bangladesh, falls under the dominion of multiple state-level policies and strategies, one institutional constitution and some faculty-level regulations. The institution, on one hand, enjoys institutional autonomy, but on the other, is heavily dependent on governmental subsidy and authoritarian directions. The university ideologically boasts to cultivate elite and independent academic culture and, simultaneously, falls under state-level neoliberal impositions with unforgotten leftovers of colonial rules. Such contradictory characteristics put the faculty members of the university in an unclear position on how to better support future graduates' employability. I interviewed high-level academics of the sample public university to understand the following key enquiries:

i. How differently do practitioners interpret the employability policy goals?
ii. How varied are the practitioners' reactions while enacting policy clauses involving employability?

I use Ball's (2012) analytical framework as a lens to look at the data I collected. This study uses phenomenological analysis to better understand the policy actors' perceptions and reactions to the state-level and institutional policies that address employability. In this chapter, I present the findings derived from the interviews taken and contrast the findings with theories and previous research outcomes.

Key Findings

I outline my findings in alignment with the two main inquiries of this research. Emphasising majorly on practitioners' interpretation of and reaction to the policies, as explained in the results chapter, the abridged key findings are as follows:

Research Question 1: How differently do practitioners interpret the employability policy goals?

The first research question intended to find out how differently high-level faculty members perceive the policy goals that address employability. I present two key findings demonstrating the faculty members' awareness of the policies and their roles as actors.

Firstly, it is clear that the policies, goals and action points have not been transmitted to the academics as the policies expected them to be. There have been repeated remarks by the respondents that the policies have not been developed in a manner to determine the definitions, parameters and responsibilities involving enhancing the employability of future graduates. In the perception of academics, the policies lack transparency for different disciplines to build and help the students travel a systematic roadmap to their desired professions.

Secondly, the faculty members' accountability in regard to enhancing students' employability is undeniably undefined and unformulated. State and institutional documents evidently overlooked specifying the responsibilities of the faculty members involving students' employability. The faculty members are often overburdened with academic and administrative responsibilities. Not that they are less caring about their students, but they find it quite uncomfortable to continue carrying out academic tasks along with more imposed activities. But, as per the situation's demand, they support the students quasi-formal.

Research Question 2: How varied are the practitioners' reactions while enacting policy clauses involving employability?

The second research question focused on how differently the practitioners performed while enacting the policy. Two major findings can be highlighted to summarise the faculty members' reactions to the policies.

Firstly, policy enactment scenarios differ from discipline to discipline and often are found in unequal conditions. Some faculties receive attention due to their overt nature and built-in connectedness with the employment market. Others face discrimination in terms of competitive advantages and lack of direct relevance in the market.

Secondly, since student career counselling and career fairs are not widely-practised services the university provides, departments mostly rely on internship programmes to support students find placements. But even the internship programmes are found not operated by formative guidelines carrying academic and professional values.

In a word, the inquiry finds unclarity of what the policies intend and how they are meant to be enacted.

Theorising the Findings

This section elaborates on four of the most important dimensions found through the enquiring process of the study. This section will duly elaborate on the transparency of policy intentions, the definition of actors' accountability, inequality in enactment sites, and the refinement of enactment measures.

Transparency of policy intentions

Literature in policy enactment research discusses how policies are interpreted by practitioners to measure how differently they are understood. Acquiring an idea of the difference has practical implications of either modifying the policy or introducing remedial measures for the practitioners. In this study, the practitioners make major claims like the absence of a functional policy on employability and the unclarity of policy goals in action. This important finding can be explained from the policymaker's and the practitioners' perspectives.

From the policymaker's perspective, practitioners are seen as actors, and their actions are attempted to be analysed to find out what functions better. Policy construct (Hudson, et al., 2016), modality (e.g., voluntary or imposed) of implementation (Taylor, 2006) and practitioners' socio-cultural and materialistic built (MacLean, et al., 2015) are argued to be determinant factors of intended understanding. On the contrary, practitioners expect the policy to be transmitted transparently before any action is taken. Practitioners, as policy actors, demand that the policy intends to be well delivered (Chase, 2016; Thomen, 2005) and that the legislation considers the institution's unique context, choice and heterogeneity (Ammi & Peyron, 2016).

However, this research clearly agrees that the expected policy outcomes primarily depend on how the actors perceive the policies. But from a holistic point of view, practitioners' understanding is more dependent on how well it has been attempted to ensure the policy goals are transmitted than to what extent the actors have been putting effort to perceive the intended meaning by themselves. Jarr (2012), McDiarmid and Peck (2012), and Wilcox and Lawson (2018) also add that the policy construct requires establishing interconnections between the actors, their agencies and the policy tools for a successful interpretation. So, in the case of this research, unclear and undefined policy measures appear as the primary obstacle for the practitioners in interpreting the employability goals intended to meet. A well-crafted policy that considers the institutional contexts and is formally disseminated among the practitioners would have seemingly been a more ideal scenario.

Definition of actors' accountability

Literature in the global north discusses practitioners' understanding of accountability prior to educational policy enactment. Accountability is not a dominant discussion in south-east Asia. Overlooking and unawareness of accountability are also visible in the findings of my study. A prime reason behind this can be the lack of taking the initiative to define and enact faculty members' accountability in HEIs. State-level and institutional policies also lack definitions of accountability.

However, the absence of accountability in the documents does not necessarily mean absence in reality. High-level faculty members have been seen to support students in a quasi-formal modality from a personal level. Present or not, faculty members have been observed to contextualise regulations to support the growth of the students and agencies they belong to. Wessel-Powell, Buchholz, & Brownell's (2019) study depicts similar results. Aithal and Kumar (2020) demonstrate in their paper that the power of autonomy can produce disruption of the enactment timeline. Their suggestion of ensuring responsibility-autonomy linkage can be a useful measure in my study.

In other arguments, commentators mention taking measures to confirm actors' accountability to ensure quality assurance (Berryhill, Linney, & Fromewick, 2009; Kai, 2009), e.g., enabling accountability policies. The respondents, in this regard, had opinions in support of formally defining their responsibilities and enabling them in a way so that institutional autonomy is unharmed. The reason behind feeling the need to have their responsibilities defined might be due to being overburdened with an unbearable amount of undefined academic and administrative workloads.

Through analysing the contrasting findings and literature, I conclude that, on the one hand, full autonomy with undefined accountability disrupts policy enactment. On the other, taking full control over practitioners' behaviour increase the level of their stress and anxiety. So, borrowing from the works of Pitton & McKenzie (2022) and Ellison, Anderson, Aronson, & Clausen (2018), I would propose a standpoint of constructing shared policy goals and taking the institutional context into account can be one way of ensuring accountability, equity and inclusiveness.

Inequality in enactment site

The interviews with high-level university academics unveiled the existence of clear inequality among disciplines in terms of receiving privilege in the labour market. Some disciplines receive prioritised advantages and have their graduates placed in secured entry-level positions due to their ubiquitous practical relevance in the field. Other disciplines are neither privileged nor directed otherwise to embed employable traits among the graduates. Discriminations of this kind are not

overlooked in the global research literature, and to some extent, evidence from the global north also bears learning elements for the case of my study.

I present an argument by picking examples from Bertrand & Mullainathan (2004) and Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth, & Rose (2013). The authors prominently find graduates being classed, raced and gendered in entry-level work placements. Along with this, socio-economic classification, access to and privilege from elite universities come into the context. Although Mihut (2022) found that university prestige and sex are not predictors of work placement, the cases of Bangladeshi graduates are sadly not the same, as stated by the respondents. Employers look forward to recruiting graduates from elite schools, but skills are also being assessed in recent times.

In another perspective, a clash between academic freedom and a “culture of militarism” has been recorded by Brown (2010), who argues against strict curricular activities. But the informants of my research clearly admitted that curricular renovation (reform, not rearrangement) is a pressing need for some disciplines. The academics’ opinions might not refer to hampering academic freedom, but a level of disciplining the curriculum was connoted in their tone. However, regarding curricular reform and establishing linkage with the labour market, two subsequent discussions appear in the context: addressing competitive advantage and taking advantage of career support experts.

Firstly, faculties and departments are suggested to analyse the emergence of new entrants, bargain with employees, and participate in the competition to create a disciplinary establishment (Porter, 1985; Porter, 1980). Establishing collaboration is supposed to allow understanding of the department’s objectives and the graduates’ needs (Cavendish, et al., 2020). And this, secondly, will create a rationale for establishing career service offices, which evidently can be a possible solution to improve employability (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017).

So, the successful establishment of operational career service centres will not only leverage students in the market but also will help them undergo the employability education their respective departments lack to provide them, place them in the level-playing competitive field and reduce additional workload from the academics.

Refinement of enactment measures

Refinement of enactment measures relates to the varied initiatives undertaken to improve employability. This section highlights how differently internship programmes are carried out than they were originally intended. Internships being mandatorily included in academic programmes have been an important policy integration. But internships do not evidently produce intended outcomes, neither academic nor professional. One explanation, suggested by Braun and Maguire (2020), is that the actors' initiatives legitimately depend on their belief system, and the enactment becomes affected if the activities are done without believing.

Although this may function as an attack on institutional autonomy, I would still argue the professional integrity of academics regardless of their complexity. From one perspective, academics have been observed to 'covertly remodel' policy interventions due to their awareness of hegemonic (Babino & Stewart, 2018). I would not label this behaviour as 'second guessing' the policy or doubting the policy (Braun & Maguire, 2020). My perception is that the policy negatively affects the efficacy and agency of academics (Wilcox & Lawson, 2018). However, I suspect as a spectator that being a part of an elite meritocratic university; the academics are not comfortable connecting with potential employers to enhance students' employability. In a sense, they are not comfortable disturbing historic institutional values.

Dynamic student support centres could have unshackled academics from administrative tasks and perform from within their comfort sphere in a definitive manner. But reshaping the academics' subjectivity towards the internship programmes' research value still remains vital in developing employable traits.

Limitations of the study

I briefly present the limitations of this study in this section which comprise majorly in methodological and a few analytical perspectives. Designing the data collection

process and putting a border during the process is a concern when the research is time-bound. In addition to that, moulding the data into succinct literature and theoretical perspectives have its own drawbacks.

I have identified two shortcomings in the literature used in this study. The first one, the analytical framework of this study, has been debated for having greater practical contribution than onto-epistemological value. The footprints of this research also go back to similar limitations of producing more tangible implications and little addition in new knowledge. And secondly, is a lack of contextual literature. Due to the topic of graduate employability not being frequently debated in Bangladeshi academia, there were nominal numbers of contextual papers that could be contrasted with the results. On the other hand, literature in the global north has a plethora of reliable publications in terms of depth and breadth, to some extent which lacked context. Although the second lack strengthens a rationale to undertake this study.

The prime limitation while planning the investigation is that I try to look into the lived experiences of academic policy actors of one elite higher education institution in the country. Even though I justify my choice of the study site, still the findings and discussions remain incomplete without incorporating empirical comparative analysis of other universities. Also, given the amount of time and resources, it would not have been possible to cover data from other institutions. Secondly, a policy scenario mainly comprises policymakers, actors and beneficiaries. The study lacks empirical data on the experiences, opinions and expectations of both the policymakers and the beneficiary group. In one way, the study focuses on the lived experiences of the actors, but the study will lack a holistic perspective of the context. Moreover, the perspective of the faculty members' ownership of their agencies was overlooked when I designed the inquiry. Although some unintentional data was conveyed by the respondents, others were missed to be asked.

During the collection of data, firstly, it was not possible to ensure the attendance of all the respondents as planned. Although the number of respondents is not vital in qualitative research, I could not manage to interview a few of the institutional policymakers whose opinions could have enriched the data to a greater extent.

Secondly, employability enactment issues and reasons behind different discrepancies were discussed during the data collection, but only I few respondents' opinions were asked on remedial measures of the issues. So, the recommendation part weighs lighter with empirical suggestions on taking corrective initiatives.

On a final note, the abovementioned limitations, on one hand, generate more enquiries for further research. On the other, they make me aware and critical of the probable implications of this study. Some of the limitations could have been mitigated if time was not limited; the others remain as lessons learnt for later routes.

Implications

The aim of this research and its findings have previously been argued to contain more practical implications than contributing onto-epistemologically. Higher education policy-making and improving employability conditions in HEIs can utilise the evidence of this study in rationalising contextually effective initiatives. The research gaps and identified issues are areas of contribution of my research in generating new knowledge.

A prime implication of this research is to broaden research scopes in Bangladeshi higher education on how to better clarify policy intentions and means. Further research can also find evidence on how to ensure communication and dissemination of policy goals to the actors. In this regard, this research can fuel bilateral discussions between the policymakers and the actors. The discussions can be scopes for the policymakers to consider inclusive and shared viewpoints to reconstruct policy goals. In this way, the policy authorities can take into account the institutional context, actors' agency and their efficacy. Finally, the findings of this research can be reminders for the policymakers to blend institutional autonomy, academic freedom and defined accountability of the actors in a way that can also contribute to reducing their professional stress.

This study can contribute to the employability policy debate within academia to minimise evidence gaps, which has reportedly been long due. This report can be

utilised as neutral evidence for the university to initiate defining and debating employability and the university's role in improving it. As per the limitations of the research, the university has the capacity to eradicate one of the limitations of this research by collecting the voice of the beneficiaries and instrumentalising them to perform as an employability catalyst alongside its original academic goals. To be specific, the university can use the evidence and discussion from this research to rationalise career service entities and effective internship programmes considering its unique institutional identity and context.

Researchers in the community can engage in more academic inquiries as this research gives birth to more questions and reveals deeper crisis scenarios to be investigated. The findings identify inequality and inequity in placing graduates in entry-level positions. The faculty members in the university are found overburdened with academic and administrative activities. Definitions of the faculty members' responsibilities and accountability are another area left ignored in research. Limitations of policy borrowing are also a pressing issue in the country. All four issues require further empirical data to support policymakers and universities in formulating effective measures to redress the condition.

The probable implications of my study can positively contribute to renovating policy and identifying contextual policy dissemination factors, foster the university's initiatives to better support future graduates to become more employable, and finally, unlocks new research areas that can produce empirical data in minimising inequality in higher education.

Concluding summary

As a qualitative study, my research had little chance to collect a vast range of data from the students and teachers of the sample university. Rather I aimed to investigate Leeper into the lives of the small group of policy actors who are positioned between the function both at the policy level and enactment. The research design thrived to investigate the gaps between the intended employability policy, the actors' perception, and their reactions while enactment. I wanted to understand how far the outcomes are in reality from the intended ones. This would

create a scope to formulate what measures to take to mitigate the gaps. However, the findings and the literature, in contrast, allow me to identify unclear policy goals, undefined accountability of the academics, inadequate career services and unequal internship initiatives as the key disrupting factors. I discuss the limited onto-epistemological contribution of the study, low number of so respondents, lack of contextual comparisons and unexpected system losses as the study's shortcomings. As practical implications, I note that clarification of policy goals to the actors, defining the university's accountability on improving employability, and debating borrowed policy measures and scopes for further research for equitable academic and professional for future graduates.

Chapter 6 | Conclusion

The aim of this study was primarily to look into an elite and Bangladeshi university's role in contributing to improving the employability of its graduates during the rising unemployment rate in the country. Visible economic growth and the significant presence of the young yet unemployed population in the market put the university under the scrutiny of the state, graduates and parents due to not receiving the expected economic return (Khatun & Saadat, 2020). On the other hand, the universities undergo contradictory situations as they are legislated to operate under heavily debated (and borrowed) neoliberal policies (Kabir, 2020). In an interest in unclogging this unfathomable complexity, Ball's (2012) framework of enacting educational policies guides me to ask how the policy actors interpret the policies in terms of employability (RQ1) and how differently they react to the policies during implementation (RQ2).

This qualitative research employs in-depth interviews with high-level academics who, by position, belong both to the policy formulation and implementation levels. The findings of my investigation reveal crucial, yet not unexpected facts within academia. First, the respondents find that policy measures uncontextualized and hard to interpret. Second, it was difficult for them to define their boundary of accountability towards an infinite amount of academic and administrative responsibilities. Third, it is identified that inadequate career service in the university puts academics in a position to support students quasi-formal. Lastly, academics identify internship programmes as generous opportunities to bridge academia with the service industry, the potential of which remains unused by the faculties.

The limitations of this study contain methodological and theoretical constraints. Firstly, the analytical framework of the study has more practical implications than theoretical ones. Secondly, the study lacks comparative contextual analysis time due to the shortage of resources. Thirdly, the literature that backs supports the development of this study mostly represents the western context and lacks explanations from Bangladesh and adjacent regions. Fourthly, the empirical data in this research does not represent the voices of the policymakers and the students and only focuses on faculty members' opener world views. Finally, although

qualitative, the study could not meet the number of respondents as planned, and a nominal number of the participants were asked about remedial measures for the current declining graduate employment condition.

This research is heavy on its probable practical implications and some theoretical knowledge-generating contributions. Firstly, this study contributes to this as an identifier of policy defects and erroneous policy dissemination. Secondly, the research unfolds on a few scopes for the policymakers to take into unique institutional account the contextuality and the actors' agency. The policymakers' consideration of blending institutional autonomy, academic freedom and the actors' accountability is discussed. Thirdly, this study presents neutral evidence for the university to act as an employability-enhancing entity by establishing functional career services and effective internship programmes. Fourthly, this research contributes to the existing literature gap on the university's role in mitigating. graduate unemployment by improving employability. Lastly, the research reminds the university to redress inequality by formulating and reconstructing institutional policies for faculty members and future graduates.

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Annex

Annex 1

In-depth Interview Schedule

Theme	Primary Questions	Probing Questions
Role	How many academics and students (roughly) do you have in your faculty?	
Strategy and awareness	What is the perception of employability within your faculty?	Is ensuring employability one of the goals in your faculty? Which are the overarching policies/strategies influencing your faculty's goals?
Institutional efforts	In which sectors are the alumni of your faculty are majorly contributing? Does the administration of the faculty have any mechanism of maintaining a database of the alumni who are in higher studies, in service, in training, in internship or in NEET? How long does it usually take for the majority of the graduates of your faculty to join a job?	What are your thoughts on initiating any such database? Will this help the faculty? What type of skills do you think is it important to be included in the curricula and the teaching-learning process? Do you think integrating soft-skills, leadership trainings, management trainings, communication strategies, academic writing, ICT skills can be included as non-credit courses?
Incentives	Are there any incentives for the academic staffs for promoting the graduates in job sectors? Is there any recognition for the alumni association if they are supporting fresh graduates with employment?	
Capacity development - Training	What are your thoughts regarding including the concept of employability within the academic activities and the curricula/syllabi of your faculty? What are the initiatives that you are aware of being taken regarding this in the teaching-learning process?	What would be your comments on the statement "the curriculum should be aligned with needs of the relevant labour market"?

Capacity development - Networks	Is there any career centre or equivalent sub-institute within the faculty? Even if there is not, is there any support for the students from the faculty/department? Do you find this necessary? Is there any form of vacancy announcement for the students? Do you think that internships/apprenticeships/traineeships/assistantships help the students become more skilled and fitter for their future? What are the initiatives on internship from your faculty within your knowledge? Does the process of internship fall in the category of partial fulfilment of the curricula?	Do you think this is important for the students to be connected to their potential future employers by their faculty? Is there any career fair/job fair arranged by the faculty? What would be your comments on these? Does your faculty have any collaboration with?
Student activism	Do you think that club activities, students' co-curricular organisations are important for their career growth? Other than the central student organisations, does the faculty put emphasis on co-curricular activities? What would be some examples, if there are any?	
Future priorities	What do you think can be done to make the degree more valuable for the students in job market?	