



**THE IMPACT OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS
ON SELECTING POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS:
THE CASE OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN BANGLADESH**

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Abstract:

With the advent of globalization, postsecondary education is considered a very significant part for any country's socio-economic development. Higher education in Bangladesh is in a state of flux while responding to the challenges of globalization and the privatization policies of the government in line with the neo-liberal economy have resulted in progressive growth of private universities in Bangladesh. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of socioeconomic status on selecting postsecondary institution in Bangladesh. Survey method with a semi-structured questionnaire is used to explore the consequences and the result reveals that socioeconomic status of the students has been playing an important role on selecting post-secondary institutions in Bangladesh. Consequently, competent recommendations are proposed to improve the situation in institutional and policy levels.

Keywords: post-secondary education, socio-economic status, private universities, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Steady economic growth coupled with years of investment in primary and secondary education has developed a sizeable middle class in South Asia as well as in Bangladesh

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with a growing appetite for higher levels of education ([Fielden & LaRocque, 2008](#)). Post-secondary education comes in a variety of sources ranging from industry and government programs ([Council, 2014](#)). For last 20 years, the economy of Bangladesh has been growing at the rate of 5% on average. This growth has been witnessed by the changing composition of GDP in the major sectors ([Bank, 2017](#)). Currently over 50% of GDP comes from the service sector and about 30% from manufacturing industries and agriculture contributing to just under 20%. This transformation in the economy created demand for higher education in the country ([Haque, 2015](#)). Given the problem of expansion of higher education in the public sector the government was convinced to pass an Act in 1992 for establishment of universities in private sector and International University of Business Agriculture and Technology is the first private University in Bangladesh was founded by Prof Dr M. Alimullah Miyan ([Miyan, 2011](#)). By now private sector universities enrollment reached 60% of total students in the campus based universities ([Haque, 2015](#); [Monem & Baniamin, 2010](#)).

Since the demand for higher education opportunities in Bangladesh has increased dramatically over the past two decades, a significant expansion of the tertiary education system in the country. At present, there are 129 universities in Bangladesh of which 103 are private, 42 are public universities and 3 are international universities ([Bangladesh, 2018](#)). Out of all private universities in Bangladesh majority of them are situated in the capital city Dhaka (Appendix 1). Public university is the best options of the students for higher education and then comes private university. With a few exceptions, public universities are failing to meet the market demand and suffering from low governance ([Rabbani & Chowdhury, 2014](#)). Private university emerged as an alternative to cope up with the expanded demand of higher education. Only a few of them are maintaining standard but a huge allegation are being raised against the rests ([Jewel, 2013](#); [Naser, 2010](#)).

Private Universities first introduced North American curriculum system in country's higher education. Four years first degree, grading system and some other innovative systems are adopted here through private universities. With some mismanagement and profit motive, they are helping to reshape the higher education to create competent and market oriented human resources ([Khan, Mridha, & Barua, 2009](#)). Not all universities are equivalent in standard, this also true for Public University. Some top ranked private universities providing better research facilities, spending a lot of money on their students, and the faculty student's ratio is good compare to lower ranked universities (Appendix 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9). Some are doing excellent, some are average and some others' standard is questionable. But it is tough to draw a common line about the standard and performance of the institutions ([Naser, 2010](#)). Since the expansion in secondary and higher secondary level, huge pressure creates at the tertiary level. A lot of students are taking admission in private universities in Bangladesh (Appendix 4). Not having enough scope, students have no choice to peruse their education other than private university. All private universities are not equally grown up based on quality and facilities ([J. Hossain, Hoque, & Uddin, 2014](#)). Students of private universities are coming from different social backgrounds. The admission

opportunities in private universities are also not equally marginalized because of the tuition and other fees of the universities ([Altaf Hossain & Zeitlyn, 2010](#)).

It is very difficult to comment definitely on the quality of education in the private universities. There is no evaluation system for this ([Bhuiyan, Hassan, & Barua, 2014](#)). Of course, the public universities also do not have any system of quality monitoring. The way the private universities in Bangladesh are going ahead does not reflect an ideal setting in terms of quality of learning, curriculum and learning environment ([Faruky, Uddin, & Hossain, 2012](#); [M. Hossain, 2014](#)).

While some studies have shown that private universities provide better quality education, there are some disadvantages of private universities, including the high cost of attendance and lack of consistent regulatory practices ([Al Helal, 2012](#)). Also, it remains to be determined whether or not students are actually more satisfied with the overall quality at private universities in Bangladesh or just with some aspects that are contributing factors to quality ([G. M. Alam, 2009](#)). Private universities are expected to take initiatives to provide a higher quality education by implementing best practices in pedagogy, curriculum, instructional methods and necessary resources ([Hoque, Mowla, Chowdhury, Uddin, & Chittagong, 2013](#)). With the higher cost of tuition, private universities have an economic advantage that enables them to use state of the art curriculum and faculty in efforts to maintain higher quality ([Ashraf, Osman, & Ratan, 2016](#)). The challenges faced by private universities include motivation for profit, inability to attract talented students who lack sufficient financial resources, and reliance on revenue from students that force the institutions to view students as “customers” who are paying for services ([Mazumder, 2014](#)). The private university sector is facing these governance challenges due to lack of transparency, accountability in its operation; ineffective monitoring by government agencies and lack coordination among these ([TIB, 2016](#)).

However, parents of those families in many cases failed to afford the cost. They can barely afford the cost of some lower ranked private universities because lower ranked private university provides more scholarships and waiver for the students (Appendix 8). Many students hope of achieving higher education nip in the bud.

There are about 103 private universities in Bangladesh ([Bangladesh, 2018](#)). Some of them are top ranking, some are mid ranking and some are lower ranking in terms of quality education provided. The education expense is also different in different universities. Usually top ranking private universities asked for higher tuition fees than lower ranking private universities therefore students from high income families are able to afford studying in top ranking private universities. So the question has arisen about the private higher education, is this only framed for the children of high income family? In order to pursue this answer a complete scenario about the expenditure in the purpose of private higher education is required.

This study tried to explore, what kind of role played by differences in socioeconomic status in selecting private universities in Bangladesh for higher studies. Socio-economic status means an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social

position relative to others, based on income, education, and occupation. In this research, BRAC University and ASA University are chosen as top and lower rank private universities respectively ([Desk, 2017](#)) and survey method with a semi-structured questionnaire is used to explore the following consequences;

1. To investigate the effects of parental economic status on the selection of post-secondary institutions.
2. To investigate the reasons behind selecting private universities for higher education.
3. To explore how the medium of instruction of the students' past academic background influence in the selection of post-secondary institution.
4. To investigate the effects of parental academic and professional background on the selection of post-secondary institution.
5. To examine the students' perception about post-secondary intuitions.

2. Literature Review

In Bangladesh, only a few studies have been done to explore the education quality of private universities. UNESCO and IIEP have conducted a research in 2007 ([M. Alam, Haque, Siddique, & Varghese, 2007](#)). Socioeconomic disparities between the rich and the poor in Bangladesh are vast; the top 5 percent of the population controls more than 25 percent of the country's wealth, while the lowest 20 percent of the population controls only about 9 percent of the country's wealth. Several studies prove the link between student participation and performance in school to the socioeconomic status of their families. There is a large educational disparity that exists between the qualities of education available to the higher and lowers socioeconomic class ([Imam, 2014](#)).

However, Eydie J. Pettigrew (2009) analyzed the impact of socioeconomic status on academic achievement as measured by the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program Achievement Test and the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program Writing Assessment ([Pettigrew, 2009](#)). Moreover, Anwar Hossain et al (2012) explored the socio-economic background and performance of the students at Presidency University in Bangladesh where the study revealed that parents' income and father's education level have influence on academic performance of a student. Past academic track records of the students plays an important role in University achievements ([Anwar Hossain, Zeheen, & Islam, 2012](#)). Furthermore, K. M. Anwarul Islam and Umme Salma (2016) investigated the role of private universities in higher education of Bangladesh where their study showed that contribution or role of private universities for the task of nation-building and reforming the education sector of Bangladesh ([Islam & Salma, 2016](#)).

Later on, Husain Salilul Akareem & Syed Shahadat Hossain (2012) conducted a study on a sample of 400 students from the five renowned private universities of Bangladesh to measure the perception toward education quality of existing students. The findings of their study showed that both administrative and faculty characteristics jointly express quality of education to a higher extent, whereas institutional features

and students' characteristics express quality of education to a moderate extent. The study also showed that perceptions toward quality of education depend on students' current status and socio-economic background ([Akareem & Hossain, 2012](#)).

Moreover, Md. Abdur Rouf and et al (2015) investigated the Higher Education of Private Universities in Bangladesh and their study revealed that the level of quality of education of all these universities is not same. It differs on the ground of their different size, location, stuffs, courses, funding authority, service rule, financial and managerial capacity etc. Only a few universities are providing the level of quality education but rests of them are not quality concerned. Most of them are depending on part time teachers, poor infrastructures, without service rules etc. In the same time, researchers have found that respondent' satisfaction level is very low on campus, lab and library facilities, though a few universities are trying to ensure standard classroom facility and library facilities. At last, based on findings, researchers have offered some suggestions that can be taken into consideration in policy level ([Rouf, Abdur, Habibullah, & Islam, 2015](#)).

Furthermore, Socioeconomic status is probably the most widely used contextual variable in education research ([Sirin, 2005](#)). Increasingly, researchers examine educational processes, including academic achievement, in relation to socioeconomic background (([Ensminger, Fothergill, Bornstein, & Bradley, 2003](#)); ([Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997](#)); ([Coleman, 1988](#)); ([McLoyd, 1998](#)).

Recently, private universities became the caption of many national dailies for multifarious corruption in higher education environment in Bangladesh. It is believed that this research will arise many important issues of the current scenario of private universities in Bangladesh as well as recommendations will be bestowed.

3. Research Design and Data Collection Methods

The study adopted descriptive survey design. It sought individuals' perceptions, feelings and attitude regarding the issues on organization learning to the development of an organization. According to Orodho ([Orodho, 2003](#)), descriptive survey is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. The study administered questionnaires to a sample of individuals.

Primary data has been collected from the students through a semi-structured questionnaire. Qualitative data and information were collected from faculties, guardians, management those particular universities.

Secondary data has been collected from books, different journals, articles, research papers, annual reports published by University Grant Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh.

The sample size for our study was 100, fifty from BRAC University and fifty from ASA University. We have used simple random sampling for conducting the interview for the mentioned universities. Microsoft Excel has been used to analyze the data and producing relevant graphs and figures.

Total 100 respondents have been interviewed from the two mentioned universities among those 100 respondents about 35% were female responders as following graph in figure 1;

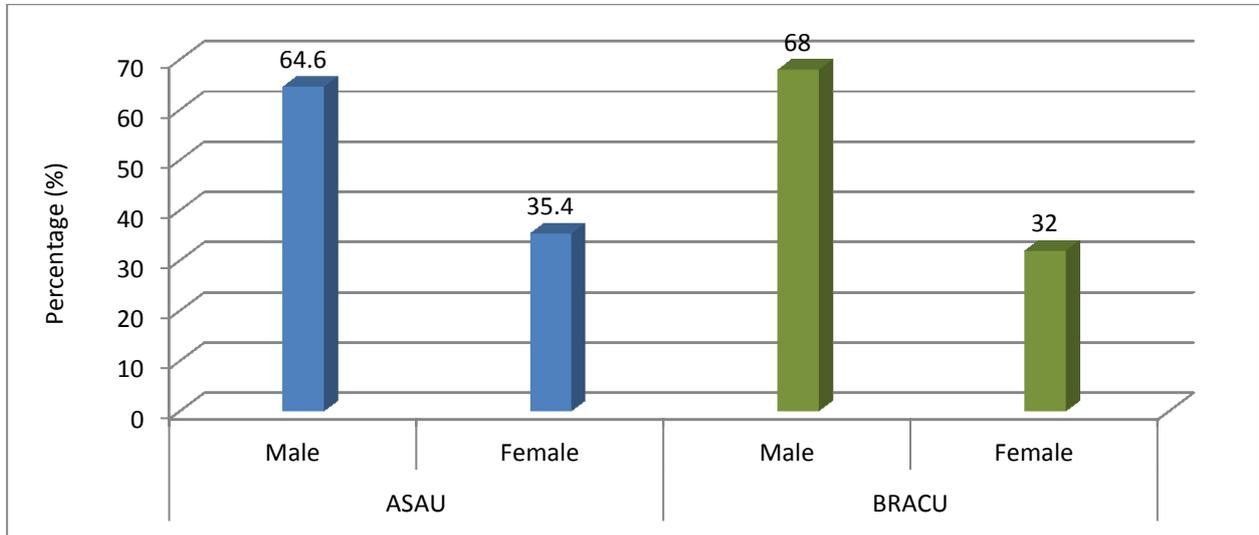


Figure 1: The Responders (%) according male female ratio

4. Data Analysis and Results

The respondent's responses have been collected through the mentioned designed questionnaire and the results are as following;

4.1 Medium of instruction of the students' past academic background

This was the first question of our main part of comparative research. This question was about the Secondary and Higher Secondary education background of the students.

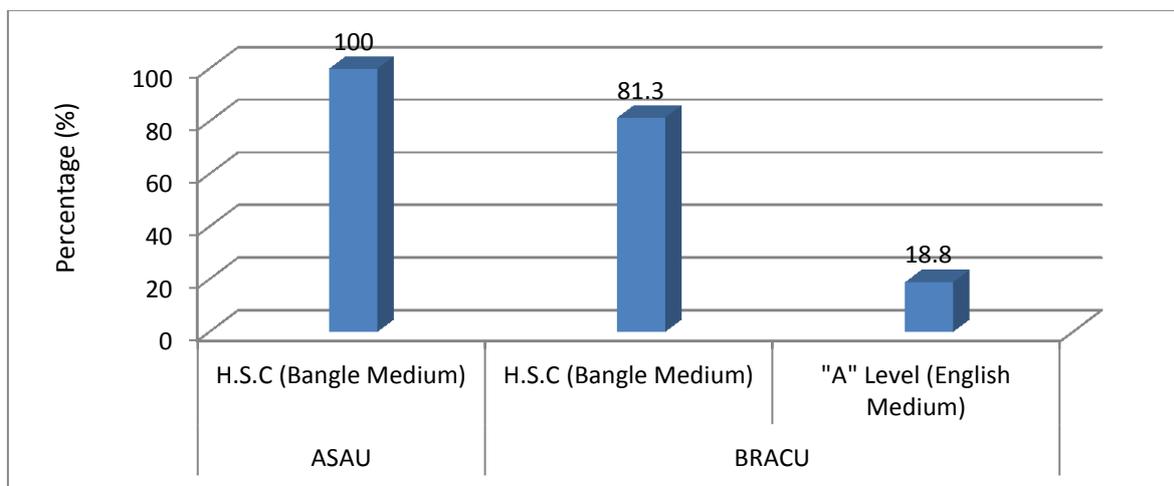


Figure 2: The Responders (%) according to their Education Background before Getting Admission in University

[Note: H.S.C-Higher Secondary Certificate (12 Years of Education), Bangla-Native Language]

As the results showed in the figure 2; the students of BRAC University, about 20% student's background was English medium. On the other hand, 100% students of ASA University were from Bengali medium background. Generally cost of studying in English medium in Bangladesh school way higher than cost of studying in Bengali medium schools therefore only rich family children can afford to study in English medium schools.

4.2 Place of completion of higher secondary level

People who live inside the capital city (Dhaka) and people come from outside of the capital city do not possess the same status. That's why this question has been asked to the respondents. The result of BRAC University reveals that about 73% students have completed Higher Secondary education from the capital city and 27% from outside of the capital city (figure 3). On the contrary, in ASA University 50% students completed their Higher Secondary education from capital city and 50% from outside of Dhaka. From this response, we can say that people who come from outside of capital city they are mostly admitted in the moderate class universities rather than the top class universities.

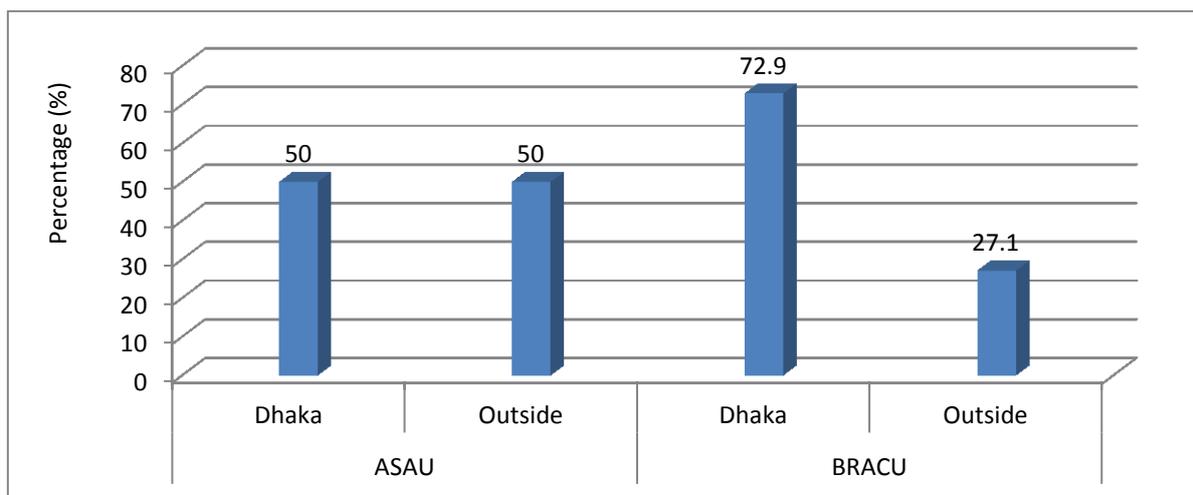


Figure 3: Location (Hometown) of the Responders (%)

4.3 Reasons behind selecting particular university

Students who were admitted in BRAC University they said that they have chosen BRAC because of quality and good brand image. On the other hand ASA university's students said that they have chosen ASA because of cost and transportation (figure 4). So from this response we can say that cost was a big factor for the students who choose to study in ASA University. This indicates that cost of study influenced their decision in selecting private university for their higher education.

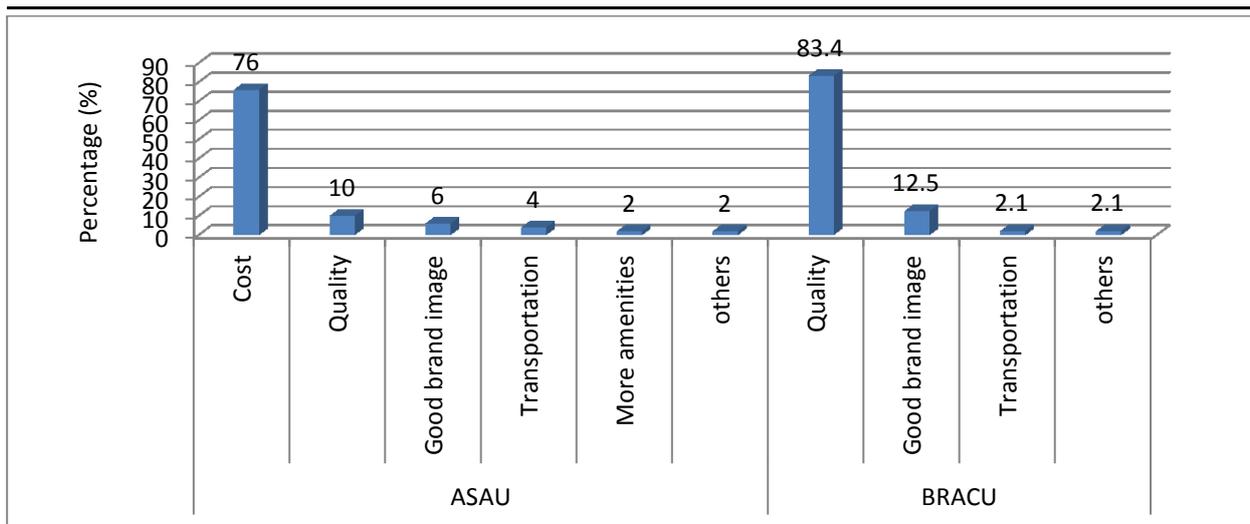


Figure 4: Reasons behind selecting particular university

4.4 Ownership of house or apartment in the Capital City

Generally, in the city buying an apartment or house is expensive that's why people who have a sound financial condition can afford their own house or apartment in this expensive city. From this study, it is found that in BRAC University 50% student's families could afford their own house or apartment where in ASA University only 28% student's parents could afford their own house or apartment.

From this response, it can be said that BRAC University students possess better financial condition than ASA University students.

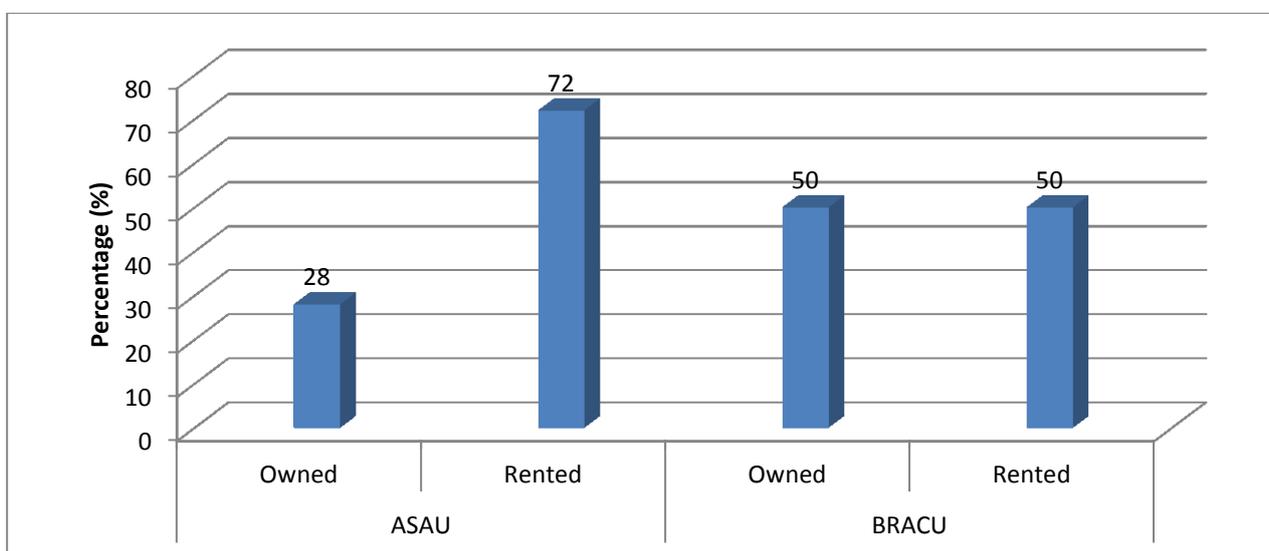


Figure 5: Ownership of house or apartment

4.6 Financial support provider

In ASA University, about 90% financial support provided by father and 2% by mother on the contrary in BRAC University this percentage is about 73% and 6.3% respectively by their father and mother.

In BRAC University, it is found that some of the student’s financial supports came from the students themselves as well some other sources.

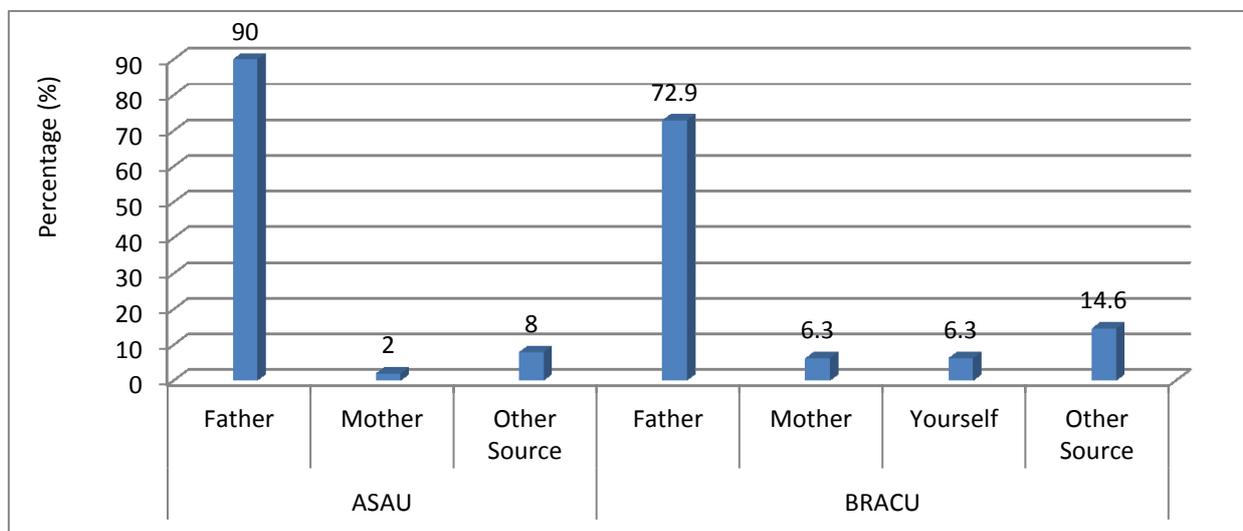


Figure 6: Source of Financial Support

4.7 Father’s education level and Professional Status

The question regarding parent’s education level is very important aspect to determine the socio-economic status of a student’s family. In this study, it is found that in BRAC University most of the student’s father is highly educated. About 80% of them are belonging to graduate level educated (figure 7). On the other hand in ASA University around 50% of the student’s fathers are belonging to graduate level educated. So it is stated that BRAC University student’s fathers are comparatively higher educated than ASA University and their professional status are shown in the figure 8.

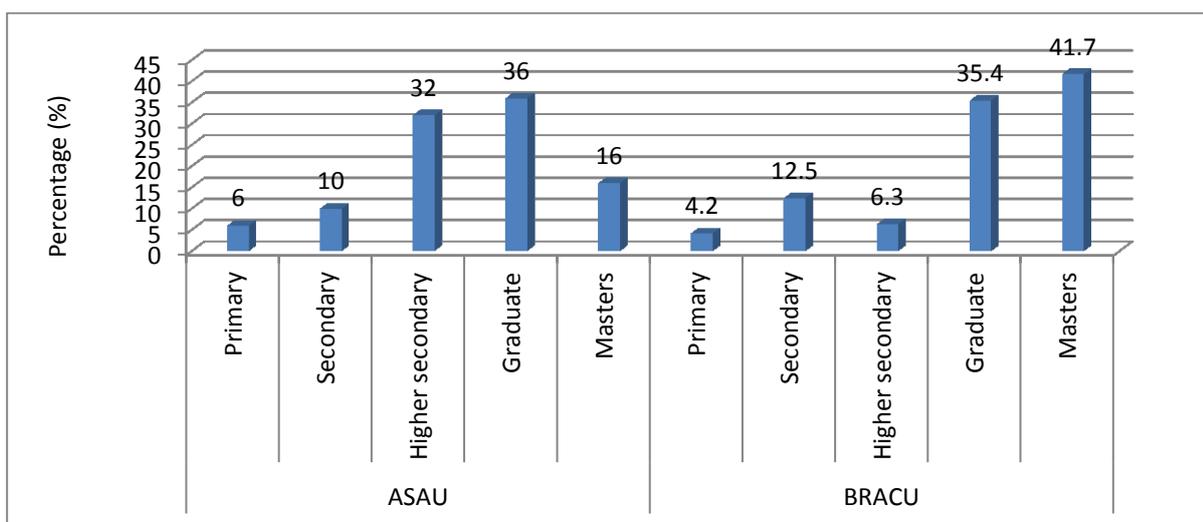


Figure 7: Father’s Education Status

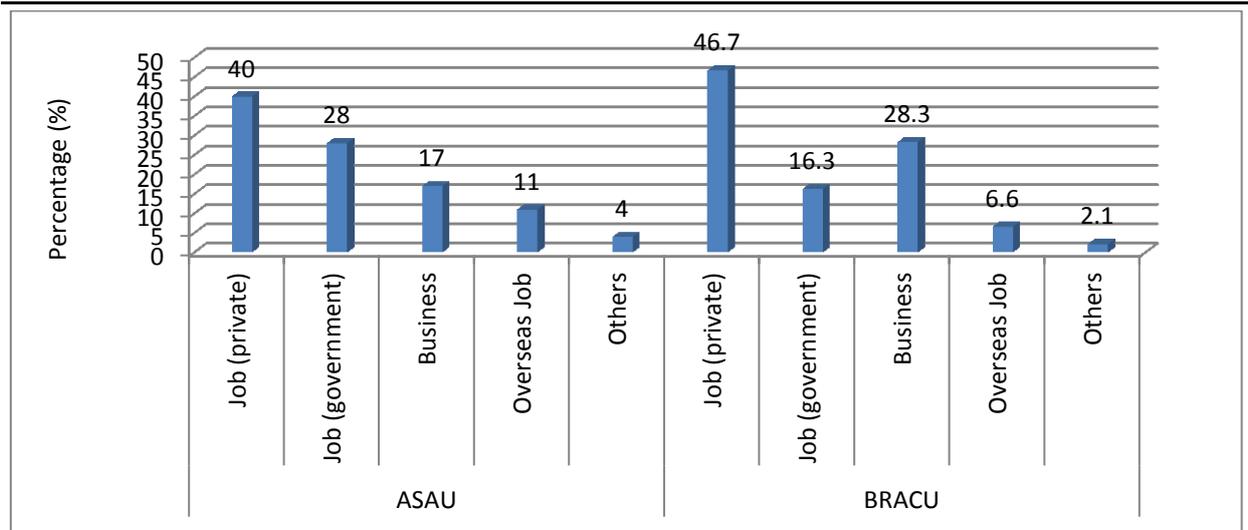


Figure 8: Father's Professional Status

4.8 Mother's Education level and Professional Status

Similar to the previous query mother's education level is also an important determinant of family status. As it is seen in the figure 9, in BRAC University most of the student's mothers are either higher secondary or graduated, on the other hand in ASA University most of the student's mother's education is secondary level.

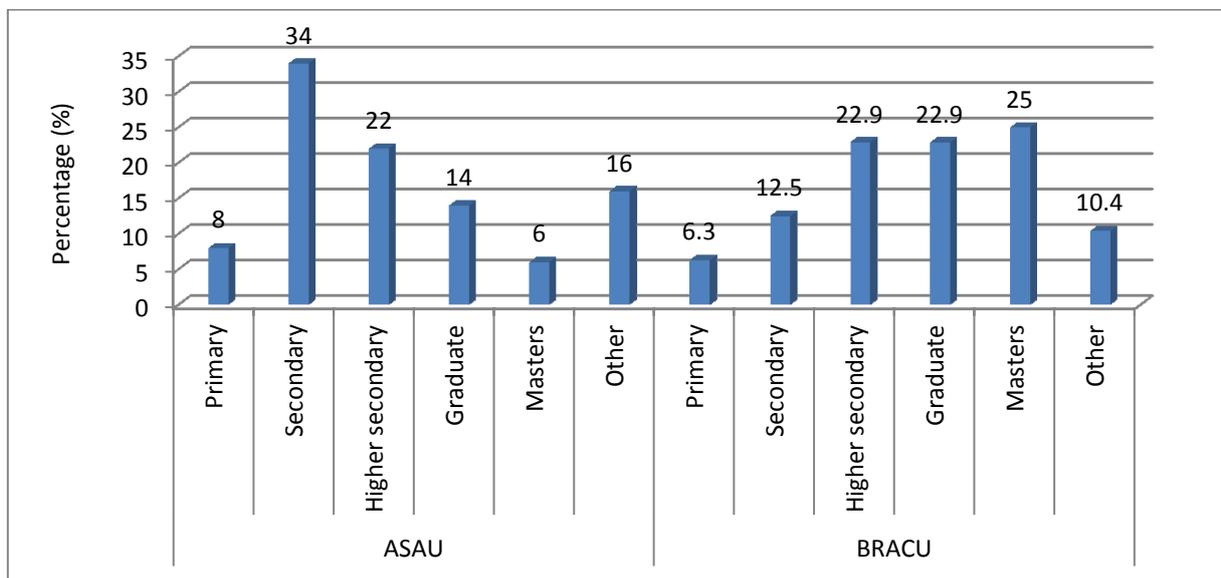


Figure 9: Mother's Education Status

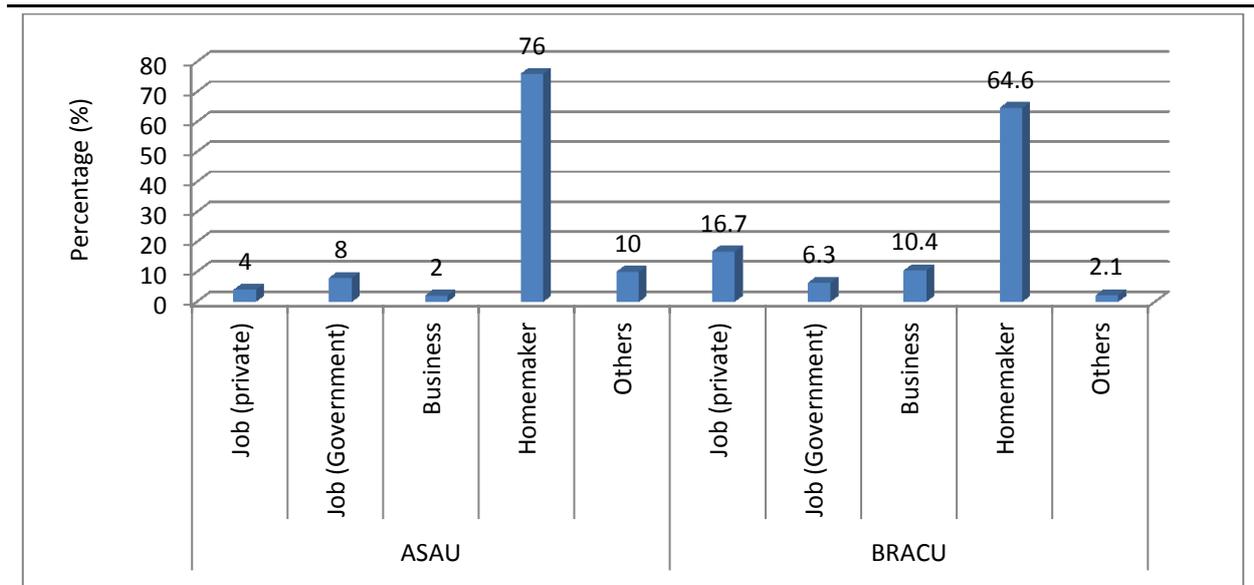


Figure 10: Mother's Professional Status

Usually, in educated families both father and mother work outside and that can define financial status and stability as well. In this research, it is found that BRAC University student's mothers are more involved in doing job or business rather than ASA University student's mothers.

4.9 Monthly Family Income

Monthly family income is a very important factor for determining economic status or economic condition of a family. From figure 11, it can easily be said that BRAC University student's parent's income is much higher than ASA University student's parents.

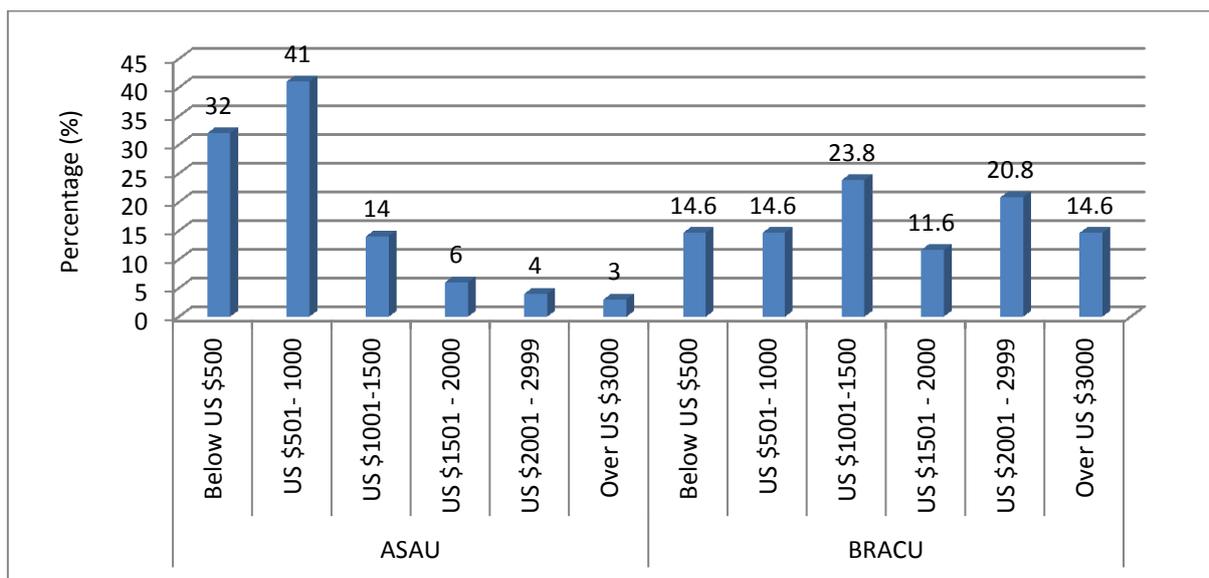


Figure 11: Monthly Household Income of the Family

4.10 Personal Transportation

In general, those families could afford a personal car that is financially sound. In this study it is found that about 44% BRAC University student's family own their personal car on the other hand only 20% ASA University student's family own personal car (figure 12). So it is assumed that BRAC University student's family possess more financially capable than ASA University.

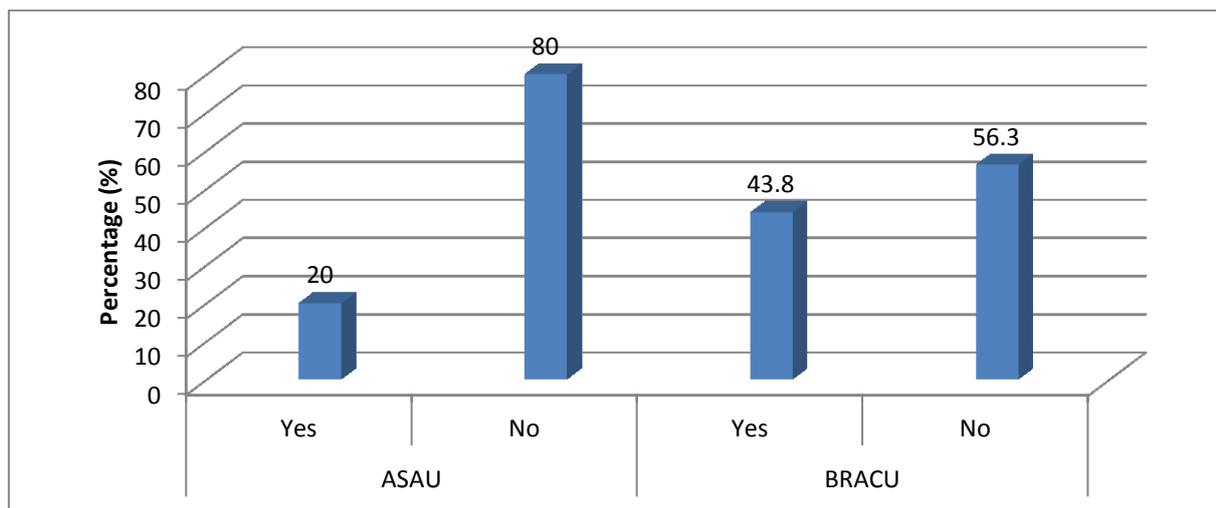


Figure 12: Personal Transportation

5. Major Findings and Discussion

Our research has been conducted on the students of two different levels of private universities in Bangladesh. One is BRAC University (top ranked private university in Bangladesh), and another one is ASA University (lower ranked private university in Bangladesh) (Surur, 2017). Major research findings are discussed as below:

- In top ranked private universities, major students are from English medium background on the other hand most of the students in the lower ranked private universities are from Bengali medium.
- Higher secondary schooling for most students who are studying in top ranked private universities are from the capital city on the contrary in lower ranked private universities majority students completed their higher secondary education from outside of the capital city.
- Majority of the students of top ranked private university stated quality education and better study environment as their reason to choose the particular university on the other hand students of lower ranked private universities stated that their failure to get chance in a public university was the major reason for selecting private university for their higher study.
- Most students of top ranked private universities selected their respected universities because of the rank, and quality education but most of the students of lower ranked university selected particular university because of lower tuition and expenses.

- In top ranked private universities most of the students' family owns apartment/houses in the capital but in lower ranked universities only few students' family owns apartment/houses in the capital city.
- In top ranked private universities there are many students' whose monthly family income is way higher than lower ranked university students' family income.
- Most of the student's families own personal vehicle and travel abroad frequently in top ranked private universities but in lower ranked universities, very few students' families own personal vehicle and travel abroad.
- Most of the respondents from both top ranked private university and lower ranked private university have agreed that only students with high socio-economic status get the chance to study in top ranked private university in Bangladesh.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a composite measure of an individual's economic and sociological standing. It is a complex assessment measured in a variety of ways that account for a person's work experience and economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education, and occupation. Our findings reveal that all of them represents students of top ranked private universities possess higher socioeconomic status than lower ranked private universities in Bangladesh. From our analysis, it's clearly found that the socio-economic status of top ranked private universities students is way higher than the socioeconomic status of lower ranked private universities in Bangladesh.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Postsecondary education isn't just about getting jobs and economic success of a nation. When it comes to building and fulfilling worldly life, good job and secured career are certainly necessary but they're not sufficient. Intangibles matter, things like personal growth and the commitment to equity and social justice also need to be considered ([Merisotis, 2016](#)). Fulfilling all those tangible and intangible needs, private universities in Bangladesh are playing a vital role in the education system of the country but only few top ranked private universities are providing proper environment, quality education, advanced infrastructure, qualified faculties, and so on. This research reveals that because of higher educational expenses and other associated factors, only students with high socioeconomic status could get the opportunity to study in the top ranked private universities in Bangladesh.

- Top private universities should lower their tuition fees and other associated fees and provide more financial support to the meritorious but needy students.
- Top private universities should offer more merit based scholarships, educational loan facilities, deferred payment system for the financially challenged students.
- Different organizational financial support for the mentioned type of students should be highly initiated.

- Individual funding or sponsorship for the mentioned type of students also could play important role regarding the fact.
- Public post-secondary institutions should increase their seats according to the increasing number of students every year.
- However, through balanced participation of different socioeconomic background students of the country could build up a prosperous nation based on knowledge and skill. To make it happen, the relevant authorities of the country should pay proper concern to minimize the socioeconomic gaps as best possible.

6.1 Limitations of the Study

Convenient sampling was used as a sample collection method. This may have caused some biases in the results. Some respondents may not been very explicit and perfect about their perceptions. Choosing more number of universities from both top and lower ranked could give wider view of the prospect as well as the reliability and validity of the research findings.

6.2 Further Research Recommendations

In future, researchers should try to select multiple numbers of universities from both top and lower ranked that could give deeper prospect of the scenario.

6.3 Acknowledgements

The support of the responders, faculties and other officials of BRAC and ASA University are highly appreciated and acknowledged.

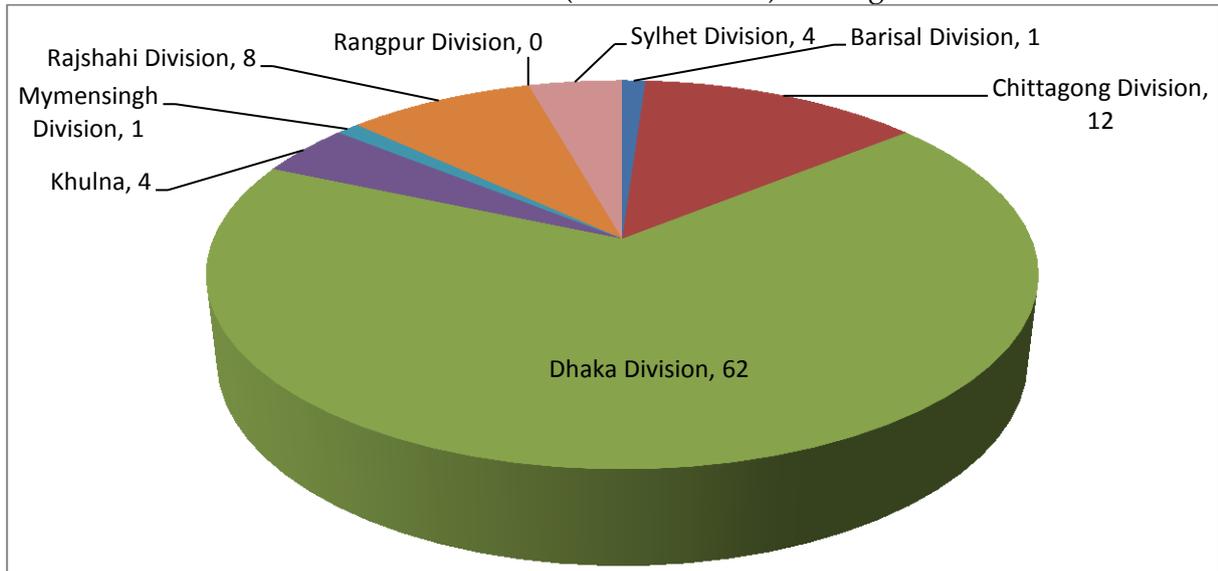
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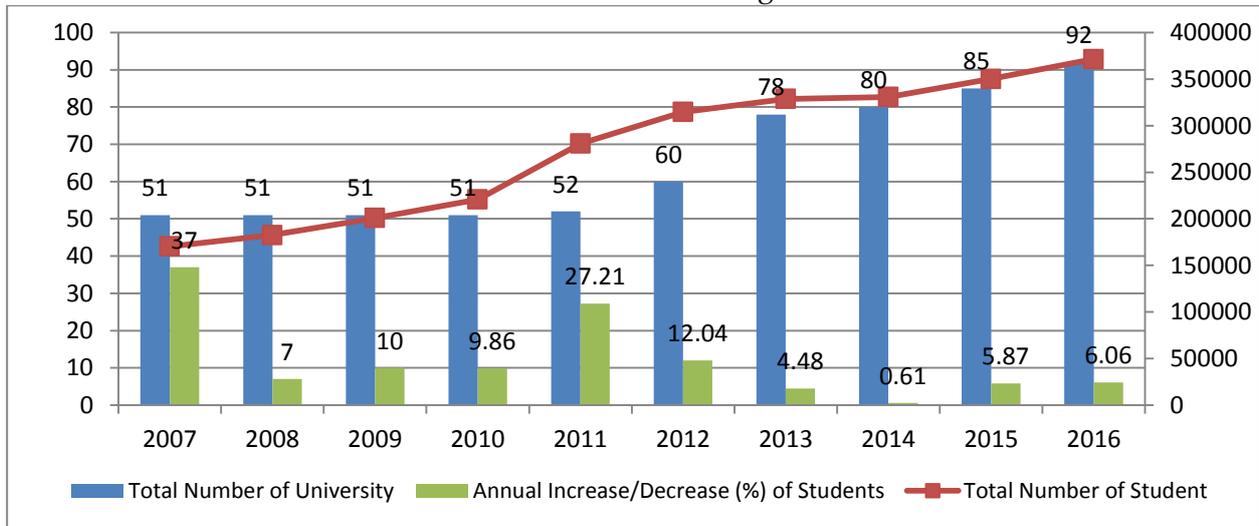
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Appendix 1: Location (According to the Divisions) of Private Universities (total 92 in 2016) in Bangladesh



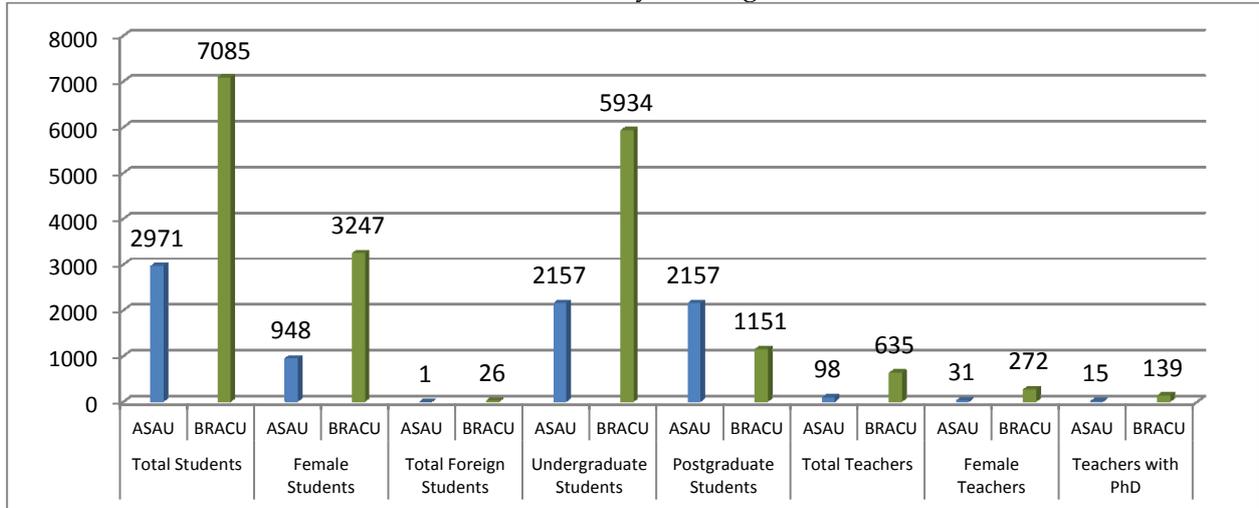
Source: UGC (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh), Compiled by the authors in 2018

Appendix 2: Composition of Students and Faculties at the Private Universities of Bangladesh



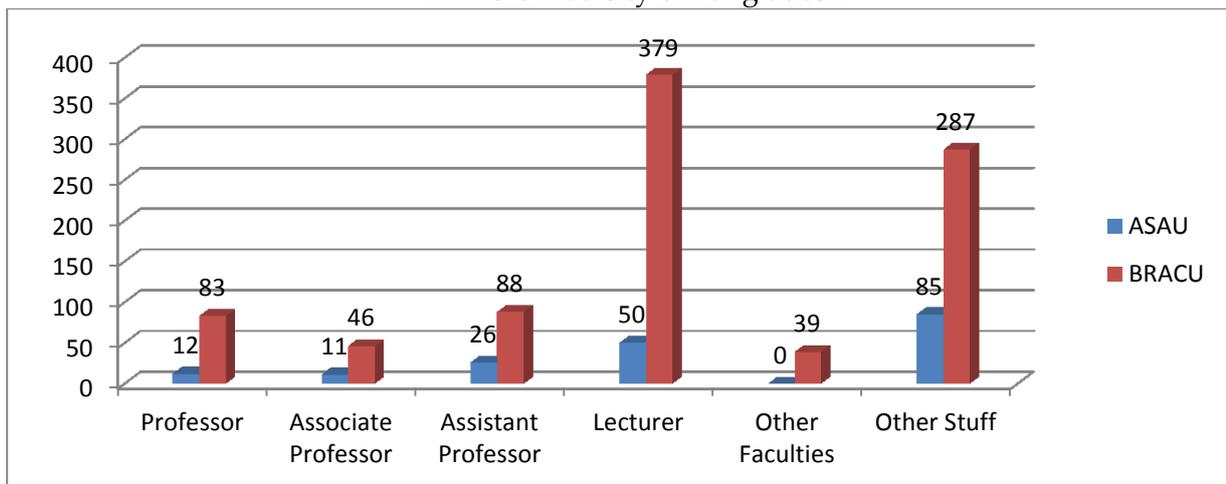
Source: UGC (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh), Compiled by the authors in 2018

Appendix 3: Composition of Students and Faculties of ASA University and BRAC University of Bangladesh



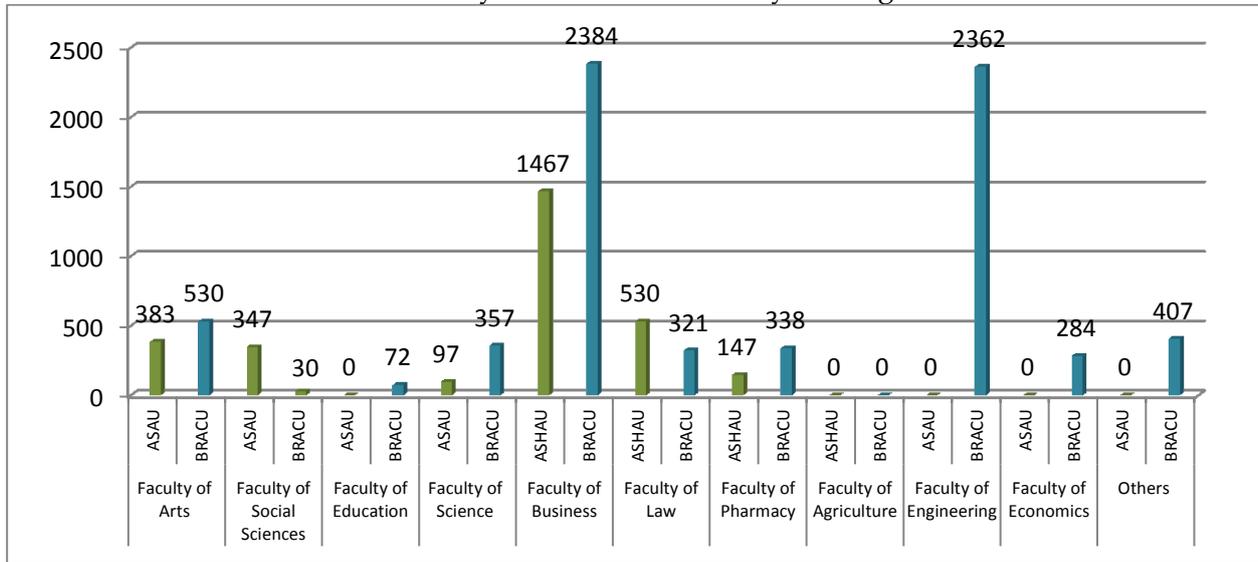
Source: UGC (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh), Compiled by the authors in 2018

Appendix 4: Composition of Faculties and Staffs of ASA University and BRAC University of Bangladesh



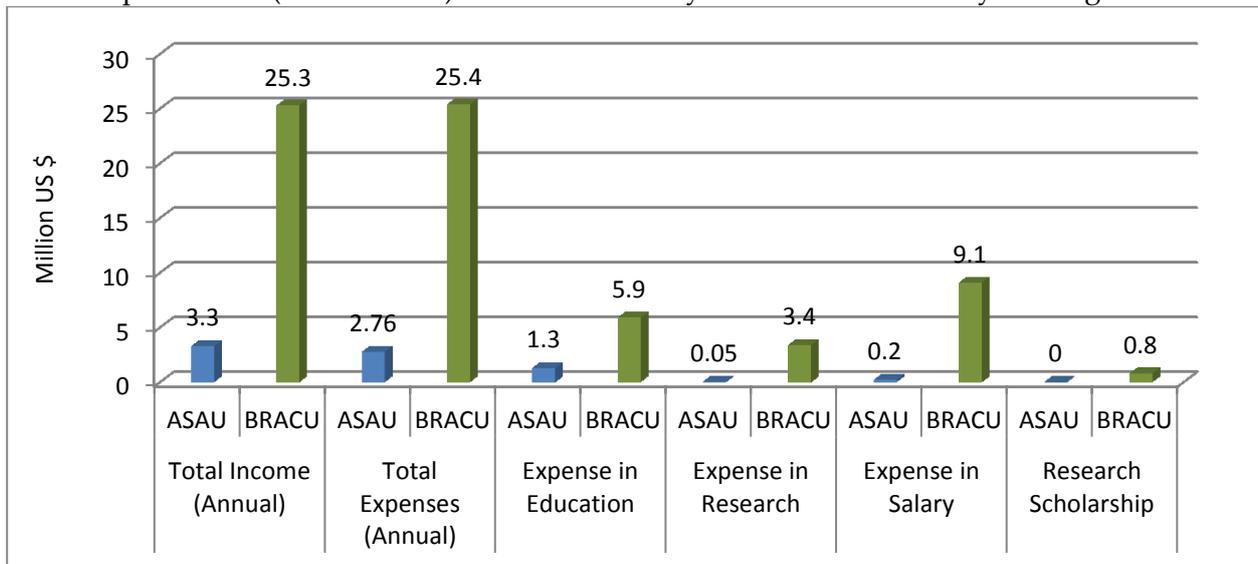
Source: UGC (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh), Compiled by the authors in 2018

Appendix 5: Composition of Admitted Students in 2016 by faculties of ASA University and BRAC University of Bangladesh



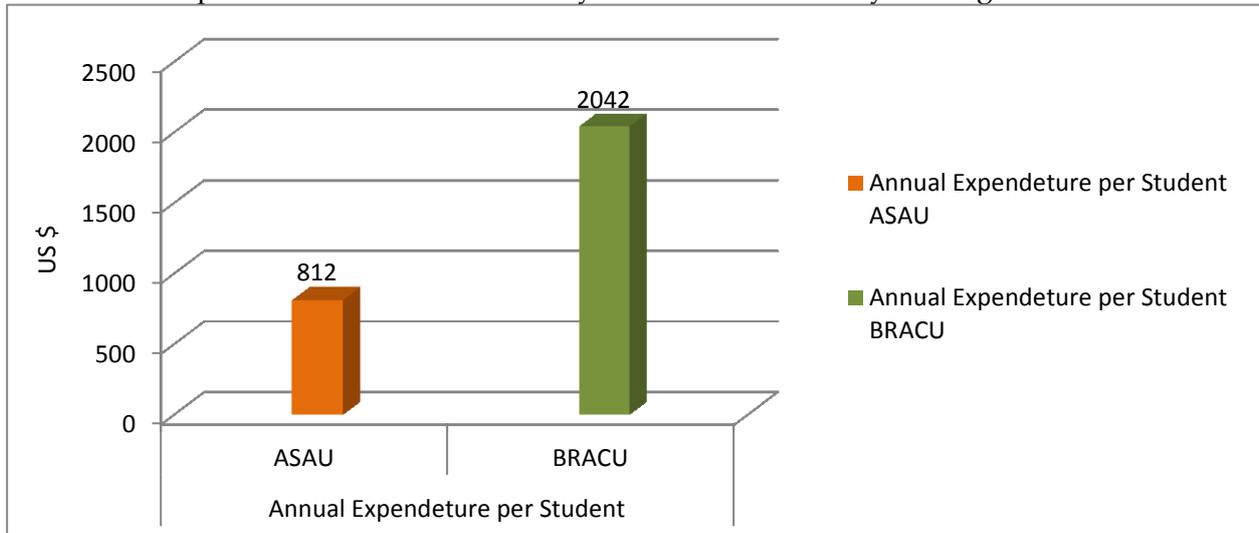
Source: UGC (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh), Compiled by the authors in 2018

Appendix 6: Composition of Annual (2016) Income and Expenditures (Million USD) of ASA University and BRAC University of Bangladesh



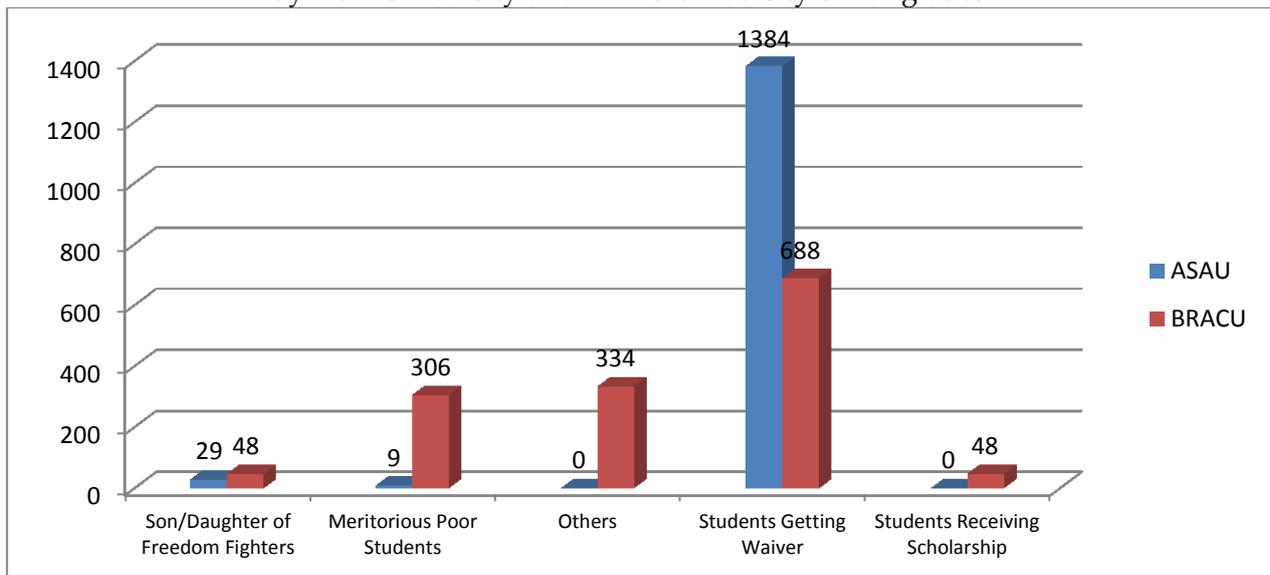
Source: UGC (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh), Compiled by the authors in 2018

Appendix 7: Composition of Annual (2016) Expenditures (US\$) by the University per student of ASA University and BRAC University of Bangladesh



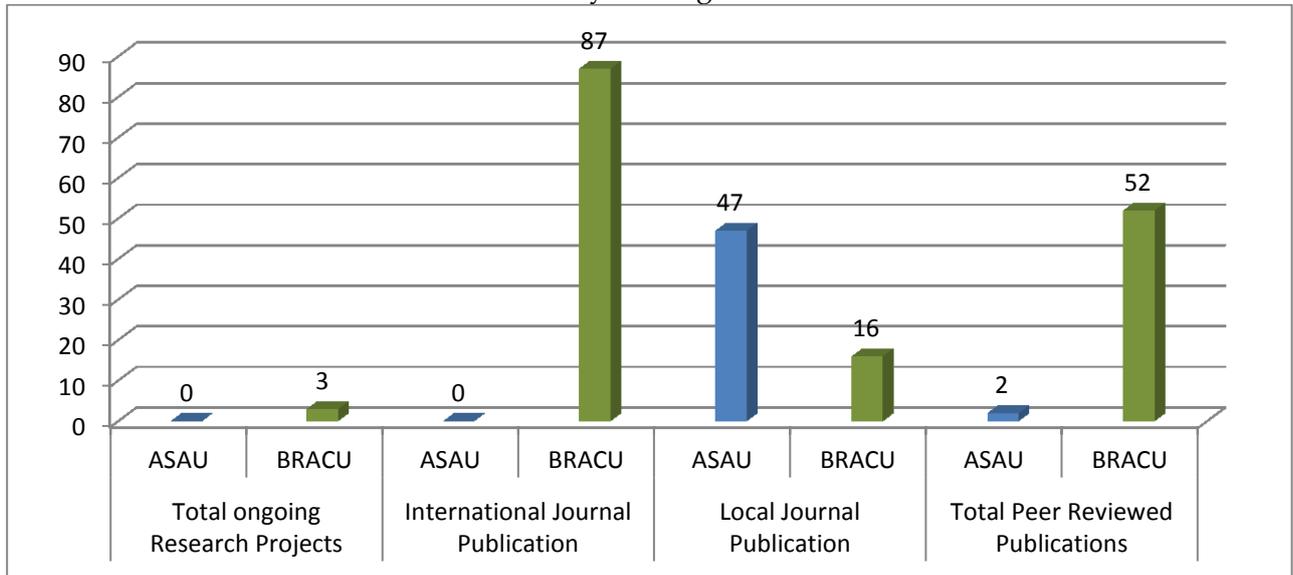
Source: UGC (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh), Compiled by the authors in 2018

Appendix 8: Annual (2016) Number of Scholarships and Tuition fee waivers provided by ASA University and BRAC University of Bangladesh



Source: UGC (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh), Compiled by the authors in 2018

Appendix 9: Research and Publication Information of ASA University and
BRAC University of Bangladesh in 2016



Source: UGC (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh), Compiled by the authors in 2018

Mohammad Ali, Md Ekram Hossain, Jesmin Aktar
THE IMPACT OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON SELECTING POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS:
THE CASE OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN BANGLADESH

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