

Teaching of Sociology in Colleges: Constraints and Challenges

Md. Anwar Hussain*

***Abstract:** The present paper deals with the teaching and learning situation of higher education in Sociology in colleges of Bangladesh. It identifies that the rapid expansion in the number of students created pressures for a transformation of higher education in Sociology from closed university system to a mass college education system, with less rigid institutional boundaries and hierarchies. The study of Sociology in colleges, however, has been facing some problems in regards to assure quality education. The present paper, thus, examines the structural and functional constraints and challenges in promoting the teaching of Sociology in colleges.*

Key Words: Sociology; Teaching of Sociology; College Education; National University; Constraints and Challenges

Teaching of Sociology as a separate discipline in Bangladesh is about fifty seven years old. The department of Sociology was established in the University of Dhaka in collaboration with UNESCO in 1957 (Bessaignet 1960). Since then teaching of Sociology at graduation and post-graduation level was confined within the premises of pioneering public universities of the country. The transformation of higher education in Sociology from a closed, elite university system to mass college education system happened after the establishment of the National University in 1992. The rapid expansion in the number of students created pressures for a shift to a mass college education system, with less rigid institutional boundaries and hierarchies. But due to the lack of necessary reading materials especially in Bangla, shortage of qualified teachers, and non-availability of proper logistic support the teaching of Sociology in colleges is found to face a variety problems to assure quality education. However, we have surprisingly little current knowledge about the structural arrangements as well as the courses and those who teach them in colleges. The present paper, thus, focuses on (i) structural and functional context of the teaching of Sociology especially in graduate and post-graduate level colleges, and (ii) the constraints and challenges faced by the colleges to assure quality education.

Methodology of the study

Primary data sources are teaching departments of Bachelor (Honors) in Sociology in purposively selected 20 colleges affiliated to the National University and its teachers and students. For our purpose we have selected 7 premier colleges, 8 non-premier government colleges, 2 women colleges and 3 non-government colleges. The study is based on survey data supplemented by some qualitative data such as Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Observation and case study. Questionnaire Survey technique was used for collecting primary data regarding the departments of Sociology in colleges under study.

* Professor Dr. Md. Anwar Hussain, Dept. of Sociology, National University, Bangladesh

National University and its academic programs

National University was established in 1992 primarily with a view to improve the standard of education at the tertiary level in the colleges spread all over the country. The main campus of the university is located at Gazipur district about 35 kilometer away to the north of Dhaka city. Unlike other public universities of the country, National University conducts its academic programs mainly through a large number of its affiliated colleges.

Since 1992 all the colleges in Bangladesh which offer general education at graduate and post-graduate level education are affiliated to the National University. About 1.5 million students are studying in about more than 2000 colleges/institutions affiliated to this university. The university has two types of bachelor degree programs: 1) three years Bachelor (Pass) degree and, 2) four years Bachelor (Honors) degree. Masters programs under the National University are one or two years in duration and are offered by a selected number of colleges. On the other hand, the university offers academic programs for professional courses by professional institutions. Besides, it also organizes regular training and research based academic programs like Master of advanced studies (MAS), M Phil and PhD in its campus at Gazipur.

The colleges under the academic control of the National University mainly offer Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Social Sciences (BSS), Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) and Bachelor Sciences (BSc) Pass / Honors; Master of Arts (MA), Master of Social Sciences (MSS), Master of Sciences (MSc), Master of Commerce (M Com) and other academic degrees. The university provides the curriculum, guidelines for admission, monitors academic activities in the colleges, holds examinations, publish results and awards certificates.

National university offers admission to 30 different disciplines of arts, social science, science and commerce. Admission of the students in all the academic programs of all the affiliated colleges is completed centrally by the use of online technology.

The affiliated colleges conducting Bachelor (Honors) programs under the National University are not uniform in terms of their period of establishment, diversity of academic programs and honors disciplines, category of students, number of students and teachers, physical facilities and other logistics to conduct academic programs at the tertiary level of education. Taking into consideration the above factors these colleges may be categorized into four main categories: Premier Government Colleges (PGCs) that are established in the district headquarters during the British period and started offering bachelor degrees under the Calcutta University and also have a long experience of conducting the graduation and post-graduation level academic programs especially under the public universities of the country; Non-Premier Government Colleges (NPGCs) which in most cases started offering Bachelor degrees during the erstwhile Pakistan period and Bachelor (Honors) education under the National University and are mainly situated in the new district (earlier sub-divisions) head quarters as well as other parts of the country; Women Colleges (WCs), both government and non-government, offering academic programs only for the female students and in most cases started conducting

Bachelor (Honors) academic programs under the National university; and Non-Government Colleges (NGCs) offering academic programs for both male and female students and in most cases started conducting Bachelor (Honors) academic programs under the National University (Hussain 2012).

Development of teaching of Sociology in colleges

Teaching of Sociology as a separate discipline in colleges is found to be incorporated in the Bachelor (Pass and Honors) academic program since the inception the National University. Initially Sociology was taught in a very few colleges and gradually it has become a popular discipline among the students. As Table-1 shows, of all the colleges affiliated to the National University about 814 colleges have an affiliation to offer Sociology as a discipline in its Bachelor (Pass) academic program and about 62,238 students have studied Sociology as a discipline in these colleges in the session 2011-12. While in 2004-05 session, the number of affiliated colleges offering Sociology in the Bachelor (Pass) academic program were 517 and the number of students studying Sociology in the same session were 15,274. This implies the fact that there is a rapid growth in regards to the number of affiliated colleges offering Sociology as a separate discipline and the size of students studying Sociology.

Table-1

Number of colleges and the number of students studying Sociology in different sessions

Items	Session				
	1995-96	2004-05	2005-06	2009-10	2011-12
No. of colleges offer studying Sociology at degree (pass)	-	517	-	633	814
Number students study Sociology at degree (pass)	-	15,274	-	39865	62238
Number of colleges offer studying BSS (Honors) in Sociology	4	25	40	116	
Number of students study BSS (Honors) in Sociology	372	3625	4523	9435	
Number colleges teaching Sociology at Master's level	-	-	24		

Source: Computer and ICT unit of National University

The tremendous growth of the size of students studying Sociology at the Bachelor (Pass) level, however, became a point of consideration for the relevant authority to open Bachelor (Honors) academic program in Sociology at many of the affiliated colleges. It should be mentioned here that in 1995-96 session there were only four affiliated colleges where only 372 students had enrolment to pursue BSS (Honors) academic program in Sociology under the National University. But, with the rise of students seeking admission

at Bachelor (Honors) academic programs the number of colleges as well as students studying BSS (Honors) in Sociology also rose significantly. In 2005-2006 session about 4850 students were enrolled to pursue BSS (Honors) degree in Sociology in 40 colleges. However, in 2009-10 session the number of colleges became almost tripled and the number of students enrolled in BSS (Honors) in Sociology appeared to become 9,435. Similarly opportunities of academic programs in the Master's level education in Sociology under the National University also increased substantially.

As is observed, there was a rapid growth in the number of colleges for teaching of Sociology and the number of students studying this discipline. But, contrary to this the supply of necessary physical facilities and logistics required for ensuring quality education in the discipline was not found to be satisfactory. The following section discusses the structural and functional arrangements and the constraints of teaching of Sociology in colleges.

Structural Arrangements of Bachelor (Honors) Teaching Departments of Sociology

Classrooms

The average number of classrooms in PGCs are 61, NPGCs 33, WCs 27 and NGCs 63. Almost all the colleges conduct public and internal examination in classrooms. But the allotment of classrooms specifically to be used by the department of Sociology in all types of colleges is very poor. The number of classrooms specifically allotted for department of Sociology for taking classes of Bachelor (Honors) courses is found to be two in PGCS, while it is found to be only one in all other colleges such as NPGCS, WCS, and NGCS. Shortage of classroom hampers regular holding of classes of the courses of Bachelor (Honors) in Sociology. Moreover, during the examination time classes remain suspended because examinations are hold in classrooms.

Teachers and students

The average number of students estimated in the department are 710 at PGCs. At NPGCs, WCs and NGCs these numbers are 532, 279 and 258 respectively in all the sessions of Bachelor (Honors) in Sociology. On an average the number of seats allotted by NU to admit in the first year Bachelor (Honors) in Sociology is found to be 195, 135, 75, and 67 at PGCs, NPGCs, WCs and NGCS respectively. Students-teacher ratio in PGCs, NPGCs, WCs and NGCS is 116:1, 133:1, 69:1 and 51:1 respectively. By the help of guest teachers the departments use to try to minimize the student-teacher ratio. Including the guest teachers the total number of teachers at PGCs is better than other colleges. In regards to fulfilling the academic requirements PGCs hold a better position among affiliated colleges under the National University offering Bachelor (Honors) academic program in Sociology.

It is observed that the number of teachers in the department of Sociology in the colleges is not adequate. The average size of the faculty members in the department of Sociology

conducting academic programs at the Bachelor (Honors) and Masters' level appears to be only 5 which are very insignificant in comparison to the similar departments in the public universities.

There exists wide difference between the teaching university and the colleges with respect to advanced degree held by the teaching staff. Teaching staff in the government colleges are appointed by the government through the Public Service Commission while the teaching staff in the non-government colleges are selected by the governing body of the respective colleges. Most of the teachers in the colleges do not have any advanced degree excepting a Master's degree which is the required minimum for becoming a teacher in the colleges. Only five teachers had PhD degree in Sociology and they are attached with departments of Sociology in five different government colleges. However, there is none among the teachers of private colleges who has PhD or an advanced degree in Sociology.

Departmental seminar library

On an average 832 books and journals are stocked in the departmental seminar library of Sociology at PGCs. The number of books and journals is 725, 633 and 654 at the NPGCs, WCs and NGCs respectively.

On the other hand an average number of 19 students issue books and journals from the seminar library at PGCs. For seminar library of the department of PGCs the student-user ratio is 40:1. On the other hand, 12, 11 and 8 students issues books from seminar library at NPGCs, WCs and NGCs respectively and student-user ratio is 32:1, 29:1 and 55:1.

Thus, seminar library facilities in the colleges are very poor for the students of higher education in Sociology. Most of the books are outdated and in most cases are not quality books. The seminar libraries do not subscribe any journal of the discipline and browsing facilities are minimal. Due to the shortage of space and resource for a rich library the idea of a computerized library may be an attractive alternative for the colleges. This again is a great challenge for the colleges.

Auxiliary staff

As of other departments, there is a poor number of auxiliary staff working in the department of Sociology in colleges. In PGCs on an average only 2 supporting staff (one third class and one fourth class) are working on temporary basis. On the other hand, on an average only one fourth class employee is working at NPGCs, WCs and NGCs respectively. Due to the shortage of auxiliary staff in the departments often the teachers themselves have to remain engaged in extra-academic works which hampers taking scheduled classes of the students.

Syllabus

The syllabus followed by the department of Sociology is designed by the National University in consideration of the areas of study covered by the public universities of the

country. It is not designed in view of availability and competence of teachers needed to teach the respective courses in the disciplines. The syllabuses are prepared by a committee represented by the members from the public universities and from the colleges. Updating of syllabus is irregular and are observed to happen as and when the authority of the university feels it necessary to make a change.

Functional Aspects of Teaching of Sociology in the Colleges

Class activities, tutorials and student's attendance

As we know that the main academic activities of the departments in the colleges are to conduct routine wise classes and tutorials. But, as it is estimated, academic institutions affiliated to the National University gets only about 175 working days to conduct class activities per academic year and for that reason department of Sociology also gets the same number of working days. The colleges remain closed for rest of the days due to various occasions. It is observed that department of Sociology at PGCs conduct only 40 classes for each course. Class attendance rate of the students is 64 percent. On the other hand NPGCs, WCs and NGCs conduct only 45, 45 and 48 classes and the percentage of student's attendance are 66, 71 and 65 respectively. Student's attendance in classes is one of the important pre-requisite for assuring quality in education of the students. According to rules of National University, if a student fails to attend 75 percent of the classes he/she should be treated as non-collegiate student. Under such circumstances a student can get a chance to appear at examination if the head of the department recommends the student to the principal to allow him to appear at the examination. Observation shows that colleges hardly follow this rule. We think it is one of the reasons that discourage students to attend classes in the colleges.

In regards to the tutorial class activities, PGCs conduct 7 tutorial classes per session and student's attendance rate is 69 percent. At NPGCs, WCs and NGCs this rate is 72, 75 and 70 percent respectively. It is observed that there is no significant difference among colleges about holding tutorial classes and other academic activities.

Class responsibilities of departmental teacher

It is observed that each teacher of PGCs is assigned 12 classes per week and the department of Sociology conducts about 72 classes per week for the Bachelor (Honors) students. Class responsibility of each teacher of NPGCs is 17 per week and department conducts 68 classes per week. On the other hand, each teacher of WCs and NGCs conduct 16 and 14 classes per week respectively and the departments all together conducts 64 and 70 classes per week respectively. Therefore, teachers of NPGCs and NGCs usually take more classes individually than teachers of PGCs. However, department of Sociology at PGCs conduct more classes per week than those of other colleges. In regards to the number of teachers in Sociology the PGCs stand ahead of the other categories of colleges.

As is observed, numbers of teachers are disproportionate to the number academic programs and classes in the departments of the colleges and the teachers are heavily burdened with assignments for classes and examination related activities. The engagement of the teachers in departmental activities is so diverse and wide that they get very little time to carry on further reading and research and their classroom performance and academic dealings with the students remain poor and stereotype. This eventually limits expected learning process although the success rate of the students in the examinations is found to be satisfactory.

Internal examination and student's attendance

In regards to the internal examinations and student's attendance it is observed that department of Sociology in government college conduct 2 internal examinations per session. On the other hand, non-government colleges conduct 3 internal examinations per session. There is no significant difference between government and non-government colleges about student's attendance at the internal examinations. About 90% of the students attend the internal examinations. By an in-depth observation we have come to know that department of Sociology use to give emphasis to the internal examination primarily for two reasons. One is to abide by the university rules designed to keep the students updated about the courses they have taken and secondly, this gives the opportunity to assess the student's performance and thereby locate the deficiencies to recover before the final examination.

Academic Achievement of the Students

To measure the quality education, academic achievement is vital indicator. As is observed, about 95 percent of the students appeared at the examination achieve a 2nd class Bachelor (Honors) degree from all categories of colleges. First Class result in Bachelor (Honors) in Sociology is rare in the colleges. A few students get Third Class in Sociology from each category of colleges such as PGCs, NPGCs, WCs, and NGCs. The dropout rate is 19% at PGCs, 20% at NPGCs, 25% at WCs and 22% at NGCs. So, there is no significant difference among the colleges in regards to dropout and if only the result is taken into consideration it can be said that academic achievement of students of Bachelor (Honors) in colleges is satisfactory.

Constraints and Challenges

The teaching of Sociology in colleges under the National University is expanding in terms of number of students, courses and institutions day by day. Today these colleges play the most significant role to provide opportunities for higher education in Sociology among the students living especially in rural and semi-urban areas. But, the rapid expansion of this discipline in colleges cannot be said all well. There are structural and functional constraints in promoting teaching of Sociology in colleges. However, we may have some idea about the constraints and challenges of teaching of Sociology in the colleges from the following case study.

Case study: Teaching of Sociology in a college

This is one of the oldest colleges in Dhaka city. As a special discipline BSS (Honors) course in Sociology was started in this college from the academic session 1998-1999. The first batch had an enrolment of 50 students which increased to a number of about 280 students in session 2009-2010.

The department has four rooms allotted by the college authority. Of these, two rooms are used as office room, one is used as seminar room and the rest one is used as class room. However, there is another one room shared by three departments of the college to take classes by turn. The class room has the maximum capacity of accommodating 60 students only. While the number of seats allotted by the university for admission of students in a session is 280.

The seminar room has the arrangement of 30-40 students to sit. But, the students are observed to sit inside the seminar room for rest and gossip only. There are only 627 books which is remained under lock and key all the time. Most of the books are in Bangla and are outdated. Only 35 books are found to be in English.

At the beginning there were four teaching posts (one associate professor, one assistant professor, and two lecturers) in the department of Sociology. But with the creation of an additional post of an associate professor and a professor the number of teaching posts has increased to six. All the teachers are of equal academic degree as is required for being a teacher in a government college. None of them has research experience or any advanced degree. Because of the absence of office assistant in the department the teachers has to remain busy with admission, registration, and examination related works. This often hamper taking classes by the teachers. However, the department is observed to get teaching assistance from some guest teachers for some specific courses.

Besides the teachers there is one seminar assistant who is paid from the seminar fund contributed by the students and two MLSS on master roll basis. It should be noted here that a department of the college usually does not get any financial support from the college authority as well as from the government to meet the contingency requirements.

Students of the department do not have regular class for all their courses. The department also do not have a seminar library enriched with books written by scholar sociologists from home and abroad. However, the result of the students in the examinations is extremely well. The success rate of the students in their examinations is more than 90 percent. This is indeed a miracle.

The case study, thus, illustrates some of the constraints and challenges of higher education in Sociology in a college in Bangladesh. But these are not unique in a particular college. Rather these are indicative to draw conclusions about the constraints and challenges of attaining quality education in Sociology.

However, we have conducted some FGD among students of Sociology in sample colleges for collecting data about the problems of teaching of Sociology in colleges at graduation and post-graduation level. Participants, representing both male and female, were 4th year Bachelor (Honors) students of the sample colleges and were limited between eight to eleven persons in each group. The discussion topics were laid down in the checklist based on the socio-economic background of the respondents; cultural attitude, attitude of students about teachers and attitude about quality education in Sociology were collected. The findings of FGD explore some of the major constraints and challenges of teaching of Sociology in colleges in Bangladesh which are as follows:

i) Lack of proficiency in English Language

In Bangladesh, students in general do not have proficiency in English. Since most of the text, reference books and other reading materials of Bachelor (Honors) in Sociology are in English the teachers and students cannot make best use of those books. As is reported, almost all the teachers teaching Sociology in colleges prefer to deliver their class lecture in Bangla and those who use to attend classes would take notes of the class lectures. However, students have a tendency to consult below standard note/guide books or collect hand notes of the older students to appear at the examinations.

ii) Non-availability of Bangla textbooks

In most of the cases the medium of instruction in Sociology in the colleges is Bangla and the students have to depend on Bangla books to meet the requirement for their studies. But they are to face problems to understand many of the difficult issues in their syllabus because of the shortage of quality books in Bangla. The demand of books by a large number of students studying Sociology in the colleges thus have become a source of encouragement to the publishers to invest more to publish books as per requirements of the syllabus. But as the market mechanism operates, the publishers always want to maximize their profit and usually they hire young writers to translate relevant issues from English to Bangla and make a compilation of issues relating to the syllabus in the form of a book. As of now we find a number of such books on different courses in Sociology in the market but are not of a quality standard and most of these are found to be guide books. Usually the students of the colleges are the principal users of those books. So, one big challenge ahead of us is to make available quality Bangla books for the huge students of Sociology in the colleges.

iii) Shortage of adequate text and reference books

Quality education depends on the availability and adequacy of text and reference books as well as other reading materials. In Bangladesh, there is a shortage of quality text and reference books as well as other reading materials particularly for higher education in Sociology. The teachers as well as students in the colleges can hardly make available recent text and reference books as well as professional journals to assure quality education in Sociology.

iv) Irregular updating of syllabuses

As mentioned earlier, the syllabuses of the colleges are designed by the National University without taking into considerations the institutional and professional realities of the colleges. It is, thus, devoid of consideration of availability and competence of teachers needed for teaching the courses of Bachelor (Honors) and Master's level academic programs. That is why, often a substantial portion of important topics are observed to remain untouched in Sociology.

Initially the syllabus for Bachelor (Honors) degree in Sociology was traditional in nature. This included papers/courses that were usually included in the syllabuses of the departments of Sociology of the pioneering universities of the country. A major revision was made in the syllabus for the four year integrated BSS (Honors) course which was made effective from the session 2001-2002. A significant change in the form and content of the syllabus was made. A number of traditional courses were dropped and new courses were included. Initially the teachers of the colleges faced problems to teach the new courses because of the non-availability of reading materials. Dealing with the newly introduced courses in the syllabus is however challenging. To overcome the challenge teachers were trained up and supplied with reading materials by the National University. On the other hand the large market of the students of Sociology in colleges attracted investors to produce books. But when reading materials for the difficult courses became available and the teachers felt comfortable to teach, another revision was made in the syllabus which was implemented from the session 2004-2005. The form and content of the syllabus was changed again giving priority to the traditional courses and in several courses, chapters and subchapters on Islam and Islamic civilization were included without considering the necessity of those items in the syllabus. However, the syllabus has undergone another revision in session 2009-2010 and also another revision in 2013-2014 session. This revised syllabus also includes a few more new courses and this would again be a challenging task for the teachers and students of the colleges to deal with.

v) Lack of required number of qualified teachers

Due to inadequate teaching staff in the department of Sociology the teachers are overburdened and as such quality teaching from the existing teachers is hardly available. Besides, the teachers are to perform clerical duties in regards to the admission of students, registration, and examination related activities.

On the other hand most of the teachers are not qualified enough to teach relatively technical and new courses in the syllabus. It is reported that due to shortage of teachers often major portion of the Bachelor (Honors), and Master's syllabuses cannot be completed. This leads the students to rely on below standard note books and also become highly prone towards adoption of malpractices for doing well in the examination.

Apart from shortage of teaching staff, due to lack of staff development programs the colleges are deprived of highly qualified teachers. Most of the teachers do not have any advanced degree or research experience excepting their entry degrees for being a teacher. They do not even have that much resource in their departments to hire highly qualified teachers with handsome honorarium for teaching the technical as well as new courses. So, due to resource constraint in colleges, it must be challenging to attract teachers with a brilliant academic background.

vi) Traditional teaching method

The teaching method in the department of Sociology in colleges is traditional and backdated in nature. The traditional method of teaching inspires only teachers to talk and the teachers depend only on black-boards for demonstrations. Today audio and videotapes, interactive videos, computers and internet have found increasing applications in the world of education and research. In a country like Bangladesh, where we have acute shortage of qualified and experienced teachers in many fields, such audio video tapes of deliveries of experienced resource persons can play a supplementary role to communicate difficult issues to the students.

vii) Evaluation of the students

Students are evaluated several times a year in the public universities. Compared to the public universities the internal evaluation system in the colleges, especially in the Sociology departments, was very poor. Because of the presence of a poor number of teaching staff in the departments of colleges evaluation of students on the basis of tutorial and assignments become impossible. The internal evaluation of students thus appears to be mere a compliance of formalities rather than meticulous assessment of student's perceptions and their depth of knowledge (Huq 2001). In the colleges the degree is awarded mostly on the basis of terminal examinations. College teachers provide terminal marks for these tests which may include assessment of course work. The value of these periodic assessments as part of internal evaluation at college level, however, is open to question as they are approached with varying levels of seriousness with urban colleges dealing with them more seriously than rural colleges (World Bank 2014).

Conclusion

The teaching of Sociology in colleges is expanding in terms of number of students, courses and institutions day by day. But the standard of education in such colleges is very disappointing. There are a variety of structural and functional constraints in teaching of Sociology in colleges. Appropriate measures are to be taken to improve the standard of teaching of Sociology in colleges by adopting such a syllabus which would have potentials to be used for a relatively longer period, making standard reading materials in Bangla available for the teachers and the students, providing training to the teachers, and by ensuring the availability of other structural and functional arrangements necessary for quality education. These, however, are the real challenges to overcome.

References

1. Bessaignet, Pierre, 1960, *Social Research in East Pakistan*, Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Dhaka
2. Husain, Anwar Md. 2012, Structural and Functional Problems Affecting Quality of Education in the Honors Teaching Colleges under the National University, Research Report (unpublished), UGC, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
3. Huq, A.T.M.Z. 2001, A Scenario of Higher Education in Bangladesh, *In Proceedings of an International Seminar on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Bangladesh*, UGC, Bangladesh, Dhaka. pp. 20-46.
4. World Bank, 2014, A Study on National University and Affiliated Colleges in Bangladesh, Report No. 65, South Asian Human Development Sector.
5. University Grants Commission (UGC), Bangladesh, 2006, Strategic Plan for Higher Education in Bangladesh: 2006-2026, Dhaka.