

Female Graduates Participation in Workforce: Scenario from the study of four Govt. Colleges in Dhaka

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Abstract: Bangladesh has been an icon in poverty reduction and development. It is on the track to be graduated from the UN's Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to the Developing Countries list in 2026, after five decades as an LDC. Graduation includes both opportunities and challenges. To ensure sustainable development, Bangladesh needs to be not just a 'developing country' but a 'developing country with high economic growth, social inclusiveness and environmental sustainability. According to BBS in 2016-17, the total labor force participation rate was 58.2%, where the rate of the male was 80.5% and the rate of females was 36.3%. However, according to another report by BBS, female participation in Bangladesh's labor force is 42.68% in 2022, which has increased from 36.3% in five years ago. Population and Housing Census 2022 by BBS shows that at present Bangladesh's female population is 83.34 million whereas the male population is 81.71 million. In this context, we can no longer afford a higher female unemployment rate. An inductive research approach has been taken to understand the main concept of female graduates participation in workforce. This research work was conducted on graduates from four government colleges in Dhaka and it was found that unemployment rate of female graduates is 67.74% and the unemployment rate of male graduates is 34.88%. At the same time, this work also focuses on the causes of unemployment from the supplier perspective of workforce.

Keywords: Female Graduate, Women Employment, Demographic Dividend, Govt. Colleges, Education

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Introduction

Background Information

Women have their rights in all aspects of life. Our constitution has strong commitment to ensure their rights in every phase equal to men. The constitutional obligations for women's right stated in article are as follows-

Article 19: (1) The State shall endeavour to ensure equality of opportunity to all citizens. (2) The State shall adopt effective measures to remove social and economic inequality between man and man and to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth among citizens, and of opportunities in order to attain a uniform level of economic development throughout the Republic. 2 [(3) The State shall endeavour to ensure equality of opportunity and participation of women in all spheres of national life.]

Article 28: (1) Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life. (2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution. (4) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens.

Gender gaps in employment appear to have an increasing effect on economic growth differences between regions. Gender gaps in education and employment significantly reduce economic growth. Thus reducing existing gender inequality in education and employment will not only promote growth, but also further these other valuable development goals (Klasen & Lamanna, 2014)¹².

There is a positive relationship between growth and gender equality and argued that, through the reduction of fertility and creation of human capital, a lower gender gap contributes towards economic development (Galor, O. and Weil, 1993)⁶.

In the context of Bangladesh, Time series evidence adheres to the notion that female labor force participation expedites Economic growth of Bangladesh (Husain, 2016)¹⁰.

This background suggests focusing on the employment scenario of female graduates of Govt. colleges.

Problem Statement

According to LFS 2023 by BBS our total labour force is 73.21 million of which 48.19 million

are male and 25.02 million are female. The total employed labour force is 70.71 million of which 46.52 is male labour force and 42.19 million is female labour force²¹. In August 2021 SANEM found that a 1% increase in women's employment can translate into an increase in economic growth by 0.31% (Sanem, 2021)¹⁷.

If it is possible to address the factors that influence the employability of female graduates, it will help to increase employability and help the country achieve sustainable growth.

Rationale

In an ever changing world, Bangladesh is facing continuous updating of its goals and targets. With sustainable development goals (SDGs), Bangladesh aims to attain status of poverty-free, high income country and to achieve sustainable development. Our economy is confronting new challenges because of 4IR than any other time before. As graduates of tertiary level education are immediate to join the labor force, they face challenges more than any other students. Engaging our young graduates to our workforce can help our economy with achieving goals and targets and facing challenges of present competitive world. According to Labor Force Survey (LFS) 2022, employed population aged 15 or older with tertiary level education was 8.3%. Employed male with tertiary level education was 9.6%, whereas employed female with tertiary level education was 5.8%²¹.

Several factors prevail which we can make responsible for female graduates' less participation. Significant factors like determination, education, entrepreneurial resilience, and personal satisfaction are appraised for women participation in workforce in an article "Assessment of the significance of factors affecting the growth of women entrepreneurs: study based on experience categorization", Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies, Vol. 14 No.1, pp. 111-136 showed Agarwal, S., Ramadani, V., Dana, L.-P., Agrawal, V. And Dixit, J.K. (2022)³.

An investigation on Malaysian graduates showed that the employment prospects of graduates with a good command of English and who possess leadership and technical skills have a higher chance to get employed compared to those without these skills. These findings suggested taking steps to improve soft skills among graduates(Hamid et al., 2014)⁷.

Evidence showed structured work experience and employer involvement in degree course design and delivery have clear positive effects on the ability of graduates to secure employment in 'graduate-level' jobs(Hoque et al., 2023)⁸.

Apart from the lack of jobs, social and cultural factors keep women outside the labour force. Other determinants relate to infrastructure, access to finance, labour laws and rural employment programs(Sorsa et al., 2015)¹⁸.

This background provides rationale for my study on unemployment rate and causes of female graduates from Govt. colleges.

Research Objectives:

General Objectives: To study on female graduates' participation in workforce

Specific Objectives:

1. To analyze the employment of female graduates
2. To explore the factors/causes those are working behind the unemployment of female graduates.

Research Questions

To investigate the employment of female graduates of Govt. college, I have set two research questions which are as follows:

1. What is the unemployment rate of female graduates from Govt. college?
2. What factors are acting behind the unemployment of female graduates?

Literature Review

Abdullah *et al.* (2022 a) did a systematic literature review on higher education and unemployment in Asian countries from 31 articles. The review included research studies published between 2018–2022. The three categories for the themes were students' expectations, the job market and economics, and education, experience, and skill development. This review identifies Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) playing a crucial role in producing knowledgeable and skilled graduates that can lead national development. In this regard, empowering higher education has become a national strategy in Asian countries¹.

HEIs enrolment has increased from 23.8 million in 2015 to 25.5 million in 2020. This reflects the global push to develop a knowledge-based economy (UNESCO, 2022; Abdullah *et al.*, 2022b)².

Unfortunately, this review found that, in recent years, Asia has been seized with high unemployment rates as graduates struggle to find employment. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019), unemployment among young graduates in this region has risen from 14.2 per cent in 2018 compared to 12.7 percent in 2022. Recent graduates have to face a highly competitive job environment. The limited job options available forced graduates to choose between idealism and realism; either settle for a less-than-suitable job or become one of the many intellectually unemployed individuals. The mismatch between skills and employment could contribute to low productivity in the workforce (Abdullah *et al.*, 2022)¹.

Noor Azina (2011) showed in her paper that the employment expectancy of graduates with a good command over English, possession of leadership and technical skills are higher in comparison with the graduates who don't have these skills. This paper suggested steps to be taken to improve soft skills among graduates¹⁵.

According to Lowden (2009), employ ability skills are considered the most important factors while recruiting fresh graduates to the world of work. Higher education institutions today interact with the industry to understand the skill requirement that fresh graduates need when they are preparing themselves for the dynamic job market. On the other hand, higher education institutions are incorporating employ ability skills curriculum within their respective programs to educate fresh graduates about the significance of developing these skills to be better prepared for careers in the figure 1. Employers expect graduates to display good communication, team work, leadership and problem-solving abilities collectively known as employ ability skills.

To ensure employ ability skills the National University of Science and Technology, College of Engineering, Sultanate of Oman introduced The Employ ability Skills Development module in the curriculum and it proved by data that the ESD module has been a very vital tool in leading and guiding students to face all the potential challenges ahead of their employment (Perera *et al.*, 2020)¹⁶.

Ahmed & Hyndman-Rizk (2020) found in the case study on the experience of female students at a public women's college in Northern Bangladesh that there are discrepancies between their instrumental and intrinsic empowerment and identified key determinants and constraints for their agency development. The research found that female students improved their intrinsic, but not their instrumental empowerment, because of four factors: stereotyped subject selection, limited IT competence, a lack of relevant job skills and limited career aspirations. The study recommended increasing educational investment to improve the quality of female higher education, so that graduates can develop the capabilities to meet labour market requirements⁴.

Bangladesh is now enjoying population dividend with 65% of its population at working age (15-64 years). According to Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), just 36.30% of students are female at the university level 16. Moreover, the Labor Force Survey by BBS revealed that there are differences between employment opportunity and remunerations between male and female (BBS, 2021)²¹.

A study investigates factors affecting private college graduating students seeking public employment after graduation using a cross-sectional survey that involved 1,290 final-year

students of a private college in Malaysia. Findings suggest that job characteristics, and some background and personal characteristics are significant determinants of respondents seeking government jobs (Woo & Teng, 2019)¹⁹.

Examination on the sharp expansion of higher education in China beginning in 1999 and analysis on its impacts on the unemployment of college graduates was carried out, using nationally representative population surveys from 2000 and 2005. This study using a difference-in-difference strategy showed that China's expansion policy has sharply increased the unemployment rate among young college graduates (Li et al., 2014)¹³.

An exploratory survey was conducted for the research to analyze the job possibilities of government owned public university and private university students in Bangladesh after obtaining their graduation, and the authors tried to examine the multi-variable factors that affecting the employment opportunities for Bangladeshi graduates with specified some suggestions which may be taken into consideration in the policy level for the betterment of the education system for creating more employment and skill development opportunities in Bangladesh (Hossain et al., 2013)⁹.

Table 1: Percentage of population by level of completed education, sex and area

Education	Rural			Urban			Bangladesh		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
None	31.8	36.9	34.4	18.4	24.3	21.4	27.9	33.2	30.5
Primary	23.9	22.4	23.1	20.8	20.1	20.4	23.0	21.7	22.3
Secondary	32.4	35.0	33.7	36.7	39.8	38.3	33.6	36.4	35.0
Higher Secondary	7.6	4.3	6.0	12.3	9.9	11.1	9.0	6.0	7.5
Tertiary	3.5	1.2	2.3	11.5	5.9	8.6	5.8	2.6	3.2
Others	0.8	0.2	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.6	0.2	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Labor Force Survey, 2016-17

Table 2: Distribution of employed persons by major industries and sex

Status in Employment	2013		2015-16		2016-17	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	53.5	41.7	43.1	34.0	59.7	32.2
Mining and quarrying	0.1	0.5	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2
Manufacturing	22.5	13.9	14.9	14.2	15.4	14.0
Electricity, Gas, steam and air condition	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.2
Water supply; sewerage, waste mgt.	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0
Construction	1.0	4.8	1.1	7.5	1.4	7.5
Wholesale and retail; repair motor vehicle	4.6	16.4	2.5	18.0	3.4	19.0
Transportation and storage	0.7	8.8	0.7	10.7	1.1	11.9
Accommodation and food service activities	0.7	1.8	0.6	2.1	1.0	2.3
Information and communication	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.4	0.1	0.4
Financial and Insurance activities	0.5	0.9	0.4	0.8	0.4	0.8
Real estate activities	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.3
Professional, scientific and technical jobs	0.2	0.7	0.2	0.6	0.1	0.6
Administration and support services	0.3	0.9	0.2	0.8	0.2	0.8
Public Administration and defense	0.6	1.6	0.6	2.1	0.8	2.0
Education	4.2	2.8	4.8	3.1	4.8	3.1
Human health and social work activities	1.7	1.1	1.0	0.8	1.2	0.7
Arts, entertainment and recreation	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Other service activities	3.3	2.5	4.9	3.3	5.4	3.3
Activities of households as employers	5.8	0.5	4.7	0.6	5.0	0.6
Activities of extraterritorial organizations	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Labor Force Survey, 2013, 2015-16 and 2016-17

Above Two tables shows trend in female higher education and employment which is though increasing but still far behind comparing to male.

It appears from our research that those women who had graduated from university were more likely to join in a company rather than starting and continuing to develop their own business. In addition to these key findings, we also found that Bangladeshi female graduate entrepreneurs had a lack of negotiation and pitching skills, little confidence, little access to institutional training and courses on SMEs and entrepreneurship. They also faced barriers such as lengthy, biased, and expensive loan facilities, corruption, operating in a conservative culture, a lack of support from their families and partners, barriers in mobility caused by traffic congestions in Dhaka, and risks to personal security (Islam et al., 2019)¹¹.

Methodology of Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection method

Primary data is collected through a questionnaire. Sample size N is 105 including both male and female graduates. The target group is students who passed at least two (2) years earlier so that they got the time to engage themselves in economic activities. Students are chosen from different subjects from four (4) faculties to get a more reliable result. Samples are being collected using stratified sampling and snowball sampling methods.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis

In analyzing collected data, both quantitative and qualitative approach is followed. The questionnaire was designed to find out the unemployment rate and causes of unemployment from the point of view of graduates i.e. from the supply side perspective.

KII analysis

Key informant interviews (KII) are carried out to find out experienced opinions regarding the female graduate's current employment situation in our economy.

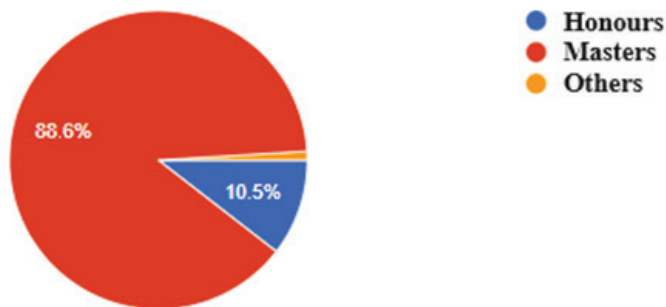
Limitation of the Paper

The main challenge is to collect sample size from students who passed 2 years earlier. The phone numbers provided in the official document are switched off. Even if students were reachable over the phone, they were less cooperative and reluctant to submit the Google form that was designed to collect primary data. Data was designed to be collected from graduates who passed around the year 2020, but it was not possible to strictly maintain the criteria. Time was another major limitation. Eventually, it was the toughest job to collect 105 samples within short time duration.

Findings from Data Collection

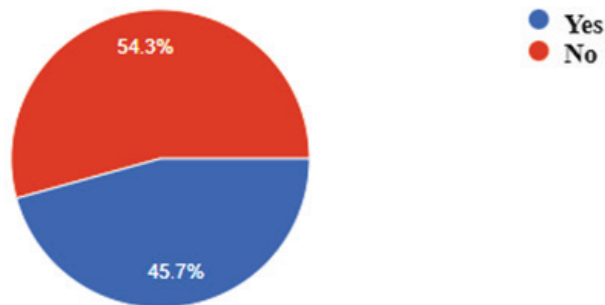
Primary data is collected through a questionnaire. Total sample is 105. Both female and male consist of total sample. Female graduates are from 2 govt. girls' colleges and male graduates are from 2 govt. boys' colleges under Dhaka University. As these female and male students are from colleges under University of Dhaka, they studied same curriculum. This same curriculum provides a platform to compare the real employment scenario of female and male students which serves the purpose of the policy paper i.e. to assess the female graduates less participation in workforce. The specific analysis is shown below.

Figure 3: Education Level



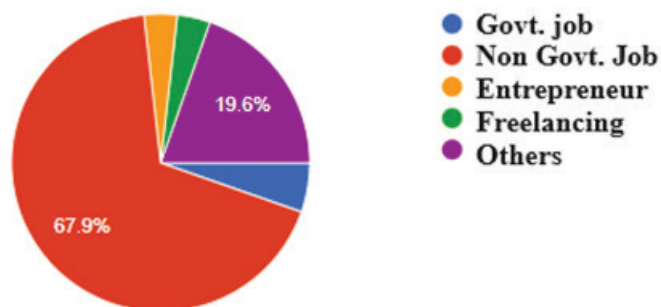
Employment Status: Among Total sample of 105, 54.3% (57) is unemployed and 45.7% (48) is employed. Among these 57 unemployed graduates 42 are female and 15 are male. Total sample of female graduate is 62 and among them 42 are unemployed. The unemployment rate for female is 67.74%. Whereas total sample of male graduate is 43. Among them 15 are unemployed. So the unemployment rate for male is 34.88%. It appears from our data that unemployment rate for female graduates is almost double than the rate of male graduates.

Figure 4: Employment Status



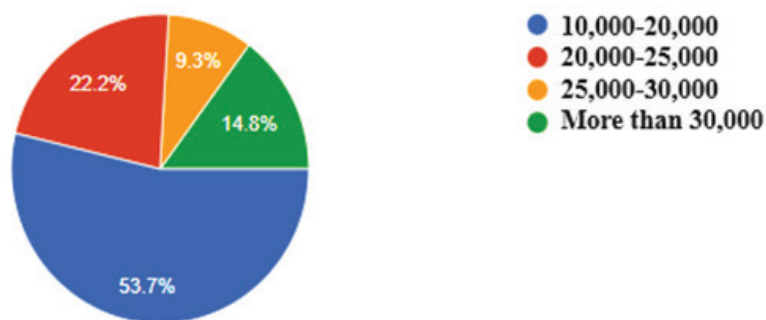
Employment Distribution: Employed 48 graduates are mostly (67.9%) employed in private sector. 5.4% are employed in govt. sector, 3.6% are both freelancer and entrepreneur and 19.6% are employed in other sectors.

Figure 5: Employment Distribution



Monthly Income: Among the employed graduates 53.7% have salary range 10000-20000. 22.2% have salary in the range of 20000-25000, 9.3% have salary in the range of 25000-30000 and 14.8% have salary more than 30000. Salaries are measured in Taka.

Figure 6: Monthly Income



Causes behind being unemployed: Unemployed graduates told about some causes they think are responsible for their unemployment.

Findings from female graduates of two govt. girls colleges: Causes responsible for unemployment according to female graduates' are listed below in descending order based on num. of responses.

- Lack of required skills (leadership skill, English language skill, IT skill, experience) regarding to job application
- Less vacancies
- Other causes
- Lack of family cooperation to balance between responsibilities regarding family and workplace
- Lack of day care center facility, convenient environment and other facilities
- Less access to capital

- Lower pay rate
- Permission of family
- Lack of social recognition
- Enough asset of family

Conclusion

As Bangladesh has a Dream Trajectory i.e. to be a developing country by 2026, to achieve SDGs by 2030, to be a developed country 2041 and moreover as Bangladesh has Demographic Dividend till 2040, it's high time we increase the participation of Female in the economy. We can't afford our female graduates' drop out from workforce as govt. invests a large amount in the education of female. Regarding the context this paper suggests three policy options and prioritizes one policy options i.e. adopting employability enhancement program through curriculum and skill development i.e. skill and career development center, internship, pedagogy to address the increase of female graduates participation in economy.

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