

Higher Institution Engagement in Partisan Politics: Perspective of Bangladesh

Mohammad Omar Shiddike and Abu Bockarie

University of Regina

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which teacher engagement in partisan politics in Bangladesh higher education institutions have influenced their teaching as well as the learning of their students. The study also examined the teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges arising from their engagement in partisan politics. A case study methodology was adopted for this study with the goal of capturing each participants' individuality and ensuring that in-depth information for each case was presented. One-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted directly with teachers in Bangladeshi higher institutions in order to explore their engagement in partisan politics. The study found that the higher institution teachers' engagement in partisan politics took time away from their professional responsibilities and accountabilities, which had serious implications for their teaching and their students' learning. In addition, while their engagement in partisan politics resulted in personal rewards for the teachers, it also undermined the status of teachers in general, as well as the reputation of higher learning institutions.

Bangladesh achieved independence in 1971 and has a land area comprising 51,703 sq. miles (133,911 sq. km) with a population of 167,830,571 (2019 est.). For a society like Bangladesh to develop and evolve, education is viewed as fundamental, as it creates a literate and educated populace (Badruzzaman & Mian, 2015; Hassan, 2016; Knox, 2009; Shiddike, 2016, 2019). Knox (2009) suggested that the people of Bangladesh view teachers as being among key leaders in establishing, developing, and sustaining an educated nation and in helping students to achieve their expectations for a better future. Accordingly, the people of Bangladesh expect teachers to teach students what they need for their intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. Teachers are expected to focus on being professional, including in their teaching activities, classroom management, and reflective practices (Gurney, 2007; Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant, & Crawford, 2015). Further, Day (1999a) argued, "Teaching is more than a craft," suggesting that it is an "educational science and a pedagogical art" (p. 22). Day (1999b) also suggested a model for reflective professionalism should include "learning, participation, collaboration, co-operation, and activism" (p. 228), which, he noted, are ideals that effective teachers should maintain as touchstones for their practice. In Bangladesh teachers, especially university teachers, are deeply engaged in partisan politics and often spend time in researching or supporting the political agendas of their preferred party (Masum, 2008; Rabbani & Chowdhury, 2014; Shiddike, 2019).

The Research Problem

In Bangladesh teachers who work in formal education institutions, especially universities, engage in partisan politics and participate in political meetings and forums, and they openly express their political views to

show active support for particular parties (Alam, Rabby, Boon, Khan, & Hoque, 2011; Masum, 2008; Shiddike, 2016, 2019). Another common practice in Bangladeshi higher education is many teachers' continual use of traditional teaching strategies, such as a heavy reliance on lectures, as well as the use of dated teaching resources (Mahmud, Mozumder, Shahana, & Islam, 2018; Rabbani & Chowdhury, 2014). This problem is partly due to the teachers' limited engagement in academic activities, as well as the limited time they devote to their professional activities (Ashraf, Osman, & Ratan, 2016; Monem & Baniamin, 2010; Shiddike & Rahman, 2019). Monem and Baniamin (2010) indicated that because of inadequate opportunities for professional development, most university teachers in the country do not utilize their time and professional abilities to either develop teaching materials or engage in academic research. As Monem and Baniamin (2010) put it, these teachers often pursue the patronage of political party leaders and appear to be driven by personal motives and choices in their work as teachers rather than by the ethos of their profession. Moreover, by engaging with political parties, teachers can enjoy freedom and empowerment to abuse their educational duties and responsibilities. For all of these reasons, I hope to explore in this research the potential implications of teachers' participation in partisan politics and the ways such participation and activism might influence their engagement in teaching at higher education institutions in Bangladesh.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which teacher engagement in partisan politics in two Bangladeshi higher educational institutions influenced the teaching of four university teachers and the learning of their students, as well as its influence on the educational institutions for which they worked. The

study also examined the teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges arising from their engagement in partisan politics. The purpose of this study was achieved by addressing the following research questions:

1. In what ways does teacher engagement in partisan politics influence classroom professional practices?
2. How does teacher engagement in partisan politics influence students' learning?
3. What do teachers see as the benefits and challenges to them from their engagement in partisan politics?
4. How does teacher engagement in partisan politics influence the institutions for which they work?

Statement of Interest

In Bangladesh we witness, to our dismay, certain teachers openly engaging in partisan politics. These teachers would acquire and disseminate relevant political information about their parties to students, participate in partisan activities on campus, and leverage benefits from their respective party leaders. Seeing the contemporary issues happening in Bangladesh higher education institutions, we have wondered about the possible implications of their political engagement for their professional roles and responsibilities as teachers. As a result, we see the development of the code of ethics as being necessary to protect students from any academic harm that might be inflicted on them by teachers engaging in partisan politics. In addition, a code of ethics might provide a moral framework for teachers so that they can demonstrate a commitment to ethically responsible practices.

As already noted, we share the views of authors who argue that teachers play a critically important role and responsibility in developing a nation's human resources (Galbraith, 2004; McLean, 2004; Pratt & Associates, 1998) Partly because of their roles and responsibilities in the education system of any country, teachers constitute a key block in the social and economic development of a nation such as Bangladesh. We strongly believe that teachers have a right to support a political party of their choice; however, Alam et al. (2011) argued that engagement in partisan politics by teachers is likely to have adverse implications for their professional roles and responsibilities, as well as the nation's education system.

Pratt and Associates (1998) contended that teaching is widely perceived as a "set of generic skills or techniques to be mastered" (p. 16), and they further stated that this view presupposes a split between content, which reflects the teacher's expertise, and the process of transmitting that content, a process that

appears as a "politically neutral, skilled performance" (p. 16). However, we have come to realize that this perspective on teaching might be flawed because it presupposes that teaching is politically neutral. We believe that one's beliefs about teaching, including about one's roles and responsibilities as a teacher, are likely to guide one's perspectives on the process. In short, we agree with scholars who view teaching as political (Cranton, 2001; Galbraith, 2004; Hare, 1993; Pratt et al., 1998). Further, we agree with scholars who argue that the development of a society like Bangladesh depends on an educated population. We see education as a key component in the development of a nation; however, as Monem and Baniamin (2010) indicated, teacher and student engagement in partisan politics appear to be a key factor in the erosion of the quality of education in Bangladesh.

Literature Review

Teacher engagement in partisan politics is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh, and Bangladeshi higher education institutions face many political influences (Ashraf et al., 2016; Badruzzaman & Mian, 2015; Masum, 2008; Shiddike, 2019). Masum (2008) indicated that since 1971, the common scenario in Bangladesh has been that public universities are viewed as political extensions of political parties and are supported from party funds. In addition, the government interferes with the institutional functions of the universities, such as employee and faculty recruitment and academic decision-making, which in effect, makes these institutions extensions of political offices (Kumar, 2017; Sarker, Rana, & Zitu, 2013; Shiddike, 2019). This practice applies to institutions established by the government as well as private individuals. In Bangladesh, political leaders, including ruling party leaders and government authorities, support the establishment and functioning of party agencies on educational institution campuses and also support the recruitment of teachers and other members of staff from their own political parties (Ahmmed, 2013; Akareem & Hossain, 2016; Shiddike, 2016, 2019).

Education at the university level in Bangladesh is guided by the 1973 Public University Ordinance (PUO) (Alam, Hoque, & Siddique, 2007; Masum, 2008). This ordinance dictates the selection procedures for the four statutory bodies of a university, which comprise the senate, syndicate, academic, and finance councils. This structure is the governance framework for all universities in Bangladesh. The PUO ordinance is sometimes seen as the root cause of much of the politicization of public university campuses (Middlehurst & Woodfield, 2004; Shiddike, 2019), as since 1973, this ordinance has been a factor in the recruitment and promotion of university administration

personnel and teachers, as well as the allocation of other benefits as a partisan political tool. In addition, Alam et al. (2007) indicated that the rules in the ordinance appear to have increased the politicization of university administrations.

Political favoritism has affected the quality of education in public universities because faculty recruitment appears to be driven primarily by partisan political loyalty rather than academic qualifications. These rules and regulations have affected the teaching, motivation, and proper guidance of the students, and it is therefore likely that the ordinance has affected effective teaching, student motivation, and student attention in the classroom as well as the overall academic environment (Alam et al., 2007; Shiddike, 2019). As Andaleeb (2003) indicated, teachers, influence students to become involved in partisan politics, and leading political parties have often used their student fronts to achieve political objectives, with the power struggles among conflicting political parties degrading the academic environment in public universities. Khaleduzzaman (2014) added that partly because of partisan politics, Bangladeshi higher education is threatened, and the target of higher education output is not being achieved. Khaleduzzaman (2014) further noted that universities appear to be failing to do their duty in terms of providing quality education to Bangladeshi students.

Teaching is a heavy responsibility and requires teachers to instill in themselves the qualities of dedication and resourcefulness (Alam et al., 2011; Behari-Leak, 2017; Hossain & Khan, 2014). For this to occur, teachers must engage in professional development activities that will have a positive impact on their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, teaching practices, and their students' achievement (Anwaruddin, 2014; Campbell, 2017; Hoque, Alam, & Abdullah, 2011). Teachers are architects of the nation and are among the founders of a nation's prosperity, development, and growth (Alam et al., 2011). The University Grants Commission (2016) of Bangladesh stated that:

The development of modern society depends to a large extent on the nature and standard of the teaching profession in higher education. Thus, the role of higher education is to prepare competent, knowledgeable and far-sighted people for assuming various higher responsibilities. The growing importance of knowledge in the modern world can hardly be overemphasized, especially in the era of globalization and in a global environment, which is fiercely competitive. Particularly, higher education has an enormous potential to promote prosperity in developing nations. (p. 109)

It is obvious from the quote that education is considered a core component of growth and

development in Bangladesh and that teachers are expected to play their role in improving the productive capabilities of the people. The country's growth and development depend on an educated nation, and thus teachers need to focus on teaching.

Unfortunately, the present scenario in Bangladeshi appears to conflict with this goal. Most teachers engage in partisan politics, and quite often they spend considerable time on the dissemination of partisan political information and participation, as well as building trust with party leaders (Bidabadi, Isfahani, Rouhollahi, & Khalili, 2016; Masum, 2008; Monem & Baniamin, 2010). Several authors, including Masum (2008) and Monem and Baniamin (2010), have argued that teachers should act in a professionally responsible manner and engage in professional and academic research instead of partisan politics. This engagement in partisan politics by teachers affects their teaching in the classroom (Hossain, Hassan, Rahman, Ali, & Islam, 2017; Shiddike, 2016), as well as Bangladesh's growth and development.

In addition to partisan politics, other factors appear to be having an impact on the higher education system in Bangladesh. Alam et al. (2007) note the following:

In Bangladesh, higher education costs and lower quality university education, students were leaving for Indian educational institutions, or those who could manage financial assistance (due to merit) or private funding would leave to study in the Western capitalist countries, e.g. USA, Canada, UK and Australia. It is reported that, on average, in a year, about 50-60,000 Bangladeshi students study in different colleges, universities, and institutes in India. Similarly, a significant number of the professors of public universities (mainly belonging to the disciplines of engineering, natural sciences, economics, and business) did not return to the country from the Western countries after completing their study leave. These bright and promising teachers were demanding both better teaching-learning environments on the campus on the one hand and better material and non-material incentives on the other; unfortunately, the state/society could not insure both of these conditions. Hence, the brains drain pupils and teachers belonging to the better education sub-sector (p. 17).

Research Methodology

A case study research design was considered as the most suitable for the study because of its ability to deal with a full range of evidence, such as from documentation, artifacts, interviews, and observations. As already stated, a qualitative research approach was used in order to explore teachers' engagement in

partisan politics and the way that engagement influenced their professional classroom practices. As a research methodology, Creswell (2002) contends:

Case studies are seen as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information including observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports, and provide a case description and case-based themes (p. 73).

Recruitment of the Study Sample

Four university teachers from two Bangladesh prominent higher institutions were recruited to participate in this study. Upon my arrival in Bangladesh for the data collection, I met with the teachers at both institutions and informed them of the three main criteria, i.e., that they must have a Master's or Ph.D. degree, a minimum of five years' teaching experience at their respective institutions, and be currently engaged in partisan politics. Based on that criteria, I randomly selected four professors (2 males and 2 females) as participants and formally invited them to join in the study.

Data Collection Methods

The primary data collection method for the study was in-depth, one-on-one interviews that involved the use of open-ended questions. In qualitative research interviews, the researcher records more than the participants' words and also inquiries about their experiences and actions, which are narrative expressions (Boje, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In addition, the interview process was based on the theoretical assumption that interviews are products of "situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 353) that reflect the moods, voices, and feelings of individual participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The interview process adopted in this study was aimed at empowering the participants to produce their own narrative accounts, which in turn were viewed as adequate representations of a more "realistic" picture of their perspectives on their engagement in partisan politics in the Bangladeshi context. The guiding questions for the interviews were developed from a review of the literature and the researcher's personal experience as a teacher in Bangladesh.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Procedures

The analysis of the data for the study was viewed as an ongoing activity, thereby making it both formative and summative (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In other words, some data analysis was done during the

fieldwork, although the bulk of the work was deferred until the end of the data collection. The importance of the analysis-in-the-field strategy stems from the opportunity it provides to direct the data collection process in a more productive manner. In other words, it paves the way for some preliminary searching for patterns, common themes, or ideas arising or emerging from the data (Ball & Forzani, 2009). In addition to the opportunity to direct the data collection process, the analysis-in-the-field strategy allowed for the taking of some preliminary measures designed to ensure the credibility of the research findings (Crowe et al., 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Almost immediately after each interview, crucial portions of the interview data were highlighted or summarized and forwarded to the respective participants along with requests for another meeting. The idea was to grant the participants an opportunity to verify that the representations of the interview data (as presented in summary form) were actually those offered by them. All the participants were able to engage in the data review process.

The analysis of the interviews started with formal transcriptions of the audio recordings. The approach adopted for the data analysis consisted of: 1) coding procedures that would place the narratives of each participant into the areas highlighted in the interviews; 2) employing a conditional matrix to allow a discursive presentation of the data that would descriptively convey the substantive content of the study; 3) comparing the theoretical concepts the participants generated to the literature reviewed and analyzing their relevance in terms of the discussion about teachers' engagement in politics; 4) interpreting what was heard, recorded, read, and analyzed; and 5) as (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) suggested, meeting any obligations as a researcher to 'tell their stories' and to give a voice to the teachers' narratives of their engagement in partisan politics.

Presentation of the Research Findings

The findings of the study start with a brief descriptive review of each participant's professional engagement and experiences. The first participant appeared to acknowledge that "Teaching is a noble profession where the art and science of a teacher are applied. The phrase "to teach" means to make something understandable to others, i.e., participants in the classroom." He believes that "teaching involves helping students to acquire knowledge and assist them in their learning," and further indicated that "teachers should take their time to implement the activities needed to support learning in the classroom."

The first participant stated, "They [teachers] get their undue promotions without research works and required publications, different positions of the

university, and also the financial benefits.” It appears as if teachers see their engagement in partisan politics as a form of transactional relationship with their parties; they expect some form of reward from the parties, including appointments and promotions to positions for which they may not be qualified. As Masum (2008) pointed out, partisan political loyalty often trumps qualifications and credentials in recruitment and promotion in higher education institutions in the country. I inquired about the participant’s own engagement in partisan politics, and he explained, “Yes, I am involved in a political party, but for me, an engaging partisan political party is the secondary. My first priority is my professional responsibility.” In short, while the first participant did acknowledge his engagement in partisan politics, he prioritized his professional work and professional engagement over his partisan political activities.

The second participant explained her teaching philosophy and then said, “To me, teaching means to help someone to learn; it may be any skill, any work, or to show the way things can be done or how knowledge about anything can be acquired.” She seemed to suggest that teaching in most Bangladeshi universities is grounded in the transmission of information perspectives, given the emphasis on completing course syllabi in time for students’ academic exams. This participant strongly believed that teachers’ engagement in partisan politics affected their classroom practice:

Sometimes teachers do not prepare their lectures properly and then spend the class gossiping or talking about their own achievements in politics. Again, political activities also impact their mind and soul, which is connected to their teaching attitude. As a result, most politically engaged teachers are unable to effectively continue class. They cannot maintain the time schedule, and they cannot complete the syllabus in time.

This narrative indicates teachers’ active engagement in partisan politics does affect students’ learning in the classroom. This participant believed that teachers benefited from their engagement in partisan politics and explained it in this way: “It often benefits teachers personally. Personal benefits like holding a political leader at a national level in future and sources of earning more money other than the teacher’s salary.” She continued, “Instead of personal benefits they [teachers] also have extra opportunities and access to power positions and such as opportunities for higher studies abroad, early promotion, on-campus residence and getting higher administration positions, e.g., dean, head of the department, etc.”

Finally, the second participant believed that teachers’ engagement in partisan politics affected the educational institutions for which they worked. She explained:

Institutions suffer as a result of non-academic activities such as lack of infrastructural development budget for a new student residence, an academic building, adding [sic] enough classrooms, new department facilities, more teachers, and more official employees, etc. Not only that, but other teachers also face challenges when they engage in different partisan political parties, which are different from the ruling parties. They receive fewer opportunities for studies abroad and promotion and on-campus residence. In addition, most of the parents and students do not like the public educational institutions for their higher study as teachers and students’ partisan politics exist.

The third participant shared his perspectives on teaching, such as the following:

Teaching means to teach someone to convey knowledge. Teaching is a very crucial and technical skill, which is really difficult. This is not like another job. Overall, the word “teaching” is only one technique, which helps to prepare all humans to perform their own job effectively. To teach means to educate students, to enlighten followers.

He also thought that “teacher engagement in politics affects teacher effectiveness in the classroom,” and that, “I believe if teachers actively focus on partisan politics more than the teaching, of course, student classroom learning will be affected.” He further added that:

Lack of research, lack of attentiveness, lack of affection, lack of future indication, lack of morality and ethics, lack of punctuality and seriousness, lack of proper knowledge sharing, lack of lecture plan and prepare materials, and lack of continuity, etc. all may be largely because of partisan politics.

The third participant appeared to indicate that as teachers engaged in partisan politics, they were likely to have a divided professional focus and concentration, which might affect their regular professional activities. Thus, it is very important for teachers to focus on their professional growth and engage in developing their professional knowledge and activities.

This participant emphasized the advantages enjoyed by Bangladeshi teachers because of their engagement in partisan politics. He noted the following:

Teachers receive change in status such as being promoted from lecturer to assistant professors,

associate professor or professor, holding higher administrative positions like Dean, Associate Dean, Chairman or head of the department, Examination or other committee head. Some achieve a Ph.D. degree without sufficient research work and publications, or campus residence facilities, higher salaries studies abroad and earning more money.

The first and second participants also expressed similar views and believed that in Bangladesh, teachers engage in partisan politics for personal gain and benefit. However, the third participant indicated some challenges teachers face due to their engagement in partisan politics, stating, "Overall, politically engaged teachers lose their values and are disrespected by students and the society. Though teachers engage in ruling government parties, they receive many benefits". However, he also indicated the following:

Day-by-day institutions lose their recognition and positions of prestige around the world. Suppose, once upon a time, Dhaka University was compared to Oxford but nowadays, across the world, among 2500 universities there is no position for Dhaka University, not any Bangladeshi universities.

The third participant believed, "Engagement by teachers in partisan politics might be acceptable, but they need to prioritize their engagement by focusing first on their teaching, as well as their professional growth and development." He also talked about teachers' engagement in partisan politics in Bangladesh:

Teachers, including myself, believe and support any political party, which is not wrong. But the problem is most of the teachers, when engaged in partisan political activities, forget their professional duties and responsibilities. They want to gain something from the ruling government to show they are an active supporter of the party, which is contradicting with their professionalism.

The third participant continued to discuss teacher engagement in partisan politics and its effects on their classroom practices:

Teaching is a creative profession. It relates to research and active participation; unfortunately, most of the teachers, when they are actively engaged in partisan politics, they do not have enough time to engage in academic research, teaching students or taking the class in a creative manner. So, it affects their academic research, proper lesson plans and effective classroom teaching. It might affect students' attentiveness in the classroom.

In short, he appears to say simply that such professional activities become secondary for many teachers who are engaged in partisan politics, which might not bode well for their profession and their students' learning.

The fourth participant strongly felt that "teaching is not only a profession; teaching is like caring about our son and daughters, caring about our future." She strongly believed that "teachers should engage in partisan politics to participate in the country's growth and development, but at the same time, teaching should be their first priority," explaining the following:

It would be very bad if we engaged most of our time in partisan political work and not professional work. We need to keep in mind that end of the month, we received our salary for teaching, not for partisan political work. We support a political party, which is for one political party. On the other hand, teaching is for everybody.

Teaching students means guiding the students' futures and caring for them as the next generation of workers and leaders, and so effective teaching is essential for the students.

The fourth participant also agreed that teacher engagement in partisan politics definitely affected classroom practices, and she responded in this way: "Partisan political views change teachers' motives, goals, morality....so it's more than obvious it will affect the students...". She thought that:

Student learning relies on teachers. In this case, how the teacher teaches depends on that. But no doubt in Bangladesh, teacher engagement in partisan politics affects student learning, affection, and attention. In addition, the engagement of teachers in partisan politics also affected the relationships between teachers and students. It also causes students to lose their learning interest in Bangladeshi higher educational institutions and to go outside the country for their higher education degree.

But why would teachers do that? She went on to state that there were some advantages for teachers who engaged in partisan politics, for example:

In Bangladesh, the majority of politically active teachers have just a tag of the teacher. Politically they have power and money under the faithful cover of teaching. When a teacher is involved in partisan politics, it becomes easier for him to jump into the next promotion without facing any obstacle, even if he does not have the required qualification, experience and capability.

Finally, in her opinion, when teachers engage in partisan politics, they also hamper their institutions' reputations. She remarked:

Students and teachers constitute the institutions. So, the effect can make the institution not only the scholar's home but also the shelter to give a nation as well as valuable humans. When teachers are engaged in partisan politics, the harmony of the balance of peace and rules in the institution get hampered.

Discussion of the Research Findings

Four broad themes emerged from the data collected for this study, and these themes are discussed.

Finding #1: Teachers' Engagement in Partisan Politics Influences Teaching Strategy

The findings of the study revealed that the participants thought teacher engagement in partisan politics took time away from adequate preparation for their professional duties and responsibilities, including research, publication, and classroom teaching. There was considerable unanimity among them on this issue. They all thought that teacher engagement in partisan politics left them with inadequate time to focus on their professional development activities, including preparation for classes as well as scholarly research and publications, and that this political engagement seriously undermined their ability to function effectively and efficiently as teachers. Their main concern appears to have been that they thought teachers spent far too much time on partisan political activities than on their professional roles and responsibilities as teachers. Although I believe that while teachers, as citizens, should be allowed to have the right to participate in the country's political system, including partisan political activities, this should not interfere with their professional roles and responsibilities, which, the participants agreed, appeared to be the case in Bangladesh.

Finding #2: Teachers' Engagement in Partisan Politics Influences Students' Learning

All the participants believed that teachers' engagement in partisan politics undermined the learning environment for their students. In other words, teachers' engagement in partisan politics adversely influenced "student learning, affection, and attention" in the classroom. Based on my experience in the country and from much of the literature, I would agree with the participants. Teachers' and students' engagement in partisan politics, which is an increasing trend in Bangladesh, encourages students to focus less on their studies.

Although the participants could not think of any way that teachers' engagement in partisan politics might promote their students' learning, it appears that students whose political activities were identical to those of their teachers received some favors from their teachers. The participants indicated that students whose party affiliations were different from those of their teachers did not necessarily get along with their teachers in the classroom and that this did not bode well for those students' learning. However, in those instances where students and teachers shared the same party affiliation, the students appeared to benefit from the affection of the teachers, and that the affection served as an incentive in the learning process. The participants also thought that by encouraging or supporting students' partisan activities on campus, it was likely that the teachers undermined the learning culture of their institutions, a point that was emphasized by Ahmmed (2013).

Finding #3: Teachers' Engagement in Partisan Politics Influences Higher Education Institutions' Reputations

The findings revealed that the research participants believed that teacher engagement in partisan politics undermined the reputation of universities as institutions of higher learning in the country. The participants thought that the reputation of higher education institutions depended in part on the quality of the academic work of teachers and students, but that this quality was compromised by teachers' engagement in partisan politics.

The participants collectively offered one main suggestion, which was that teachers and students should refrain from engaging in partisan political activities on campus. They acknowledged that, as citizens, teachers and students had the right to participate in the nation's political system; however, they thought that teachers and students were much better off by focusing much more on their academic activities than on partisan politics. I agree with the participants' suggestions and those of several other authors who have argued that teachers should refrain from partisan political activities in the workplace and instead focus much more on the successful performance of their professional roles and responsibilities (Masum, 2008; Rabbani & Chowdhury, 2014)

Finding #4: Benefits and Challenges to Teachers Resulting from Their Engagement in Partisan Politics

The findings of this study revealed that the participants thought that teachers who were engaged in partisan politics benefitted from such engagement, probably due to the transactional relationships that

existed between them and their political parties, especially the parties in power. All the participants agreed that teachers received personal benefits like financial rewards and promotions, primarily because of their engagement in partisan politics.

This issue is very important, as much of the literature appears to emphasize the perceived benefits of engagement for teachers, and there is hardly any discussion of the perceived challenges to teachers regarding their engagement in partisan politics. While I agree that teacher engagement in partisan politics might help teachers to achieve tangible wealth and positional power, I also view their engagement as a factor in losing their honor, respect, and social acceptance. As a Bangladeshi national and former university teacher from that country, I believe that the honour and respect teachers enjoy from students and society is a source of infinite benefit compared to the limited tangible benefit they receive due to their engagement in partisan politics.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the literature reviewed, as well as my experiences as a teacher from Bangladesh, the following broad recommendations are offered concerning Bangladeshi teachers' engagement in partisan politics.

The first recommendation relates to the amendment or reform of the 1973 Public Universities Ordinance (PUO) Act. The participants believed that the ordinance allowed Bangladeshi political parties, especially the parties in power, to use teachers and students as political agents on university campuses. The second recommendation is that teachers should focus primarily on their professional engagement and academic development rather than partisan political engagement. The findings of the study indicate that teachers should utilize their time and effort to focus on their professional responsibilities and duties. The third recommendation is that recruitment and promotion to academic and staff positions at universities should be based primarily on professionalism, academic experience, and qualifications rather than partisan political loyalty, as appears to currently be the case in the country. The fourth recommendation relates to the establishment of accountability for teachers based on professional ethics and values.

Lastly, it is my view that the government of Bangladesh needs to focus on improving the higher education system in order to provide a better quality of education for the citizens. Accordingly, government and opposition leaders need to encourage teachers and students to increase their academic engagement and focus on the concept of academic success, as well as to reduce their engagement in partisan politics.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The most significant limitation of this study was the lack of generalizability of the findings. The study was only based on the experiences and perceptions of four teachers (2 males and 2 females) from two universities in Bangladesh who volunteered to participate in the research. Therefore, the study sample was not representative of university teachers engaged in partisan politics across the country. Further, the data for the study were collected through one-on-one in-depth interviews only, and therefore, partly because of issues of confidentiality, there was no extensive review and use of the participants' employment documents and records. As well, the research design depended solely on qualitative data-gathering methods, and no quantitative surveys were used to add to the data collected from the interviews. Finally, the researcher's personal experiences and familiarity with the issues relating to teacher engagement in partisan politics in Bangladesh may have influenced the interpretations of the research data. In future research, these issues should be addressed.

This study focused on the ways in which teacher engagement in partisan politics might influence their teaching and their students' learning, as well as their institutions' reputations and the benefits and challenges of such engagement. A study with broader sampling that involves all key stakeholder groups, such as party officials, university administrators, students, and students' parents, could provide a much better understanding of the broader implications of teacher engagement in partisan politics. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to study not only teachers, but also other professionals in Bangladesh, like doctors, lawyers, nurses, etc. who might be engaged in national partisan politics. Such a study would provide a more balanced view of the experiences of a broader range of professionals relative to their engagement in partisan politics in the country.

In addition, a comparative study of the experiences of both teachers who engage in partisan politics and those who do not could provide further insights and valuable information. Conducting a study of this sort on a countrywide basis to include primary and secondary school teachers could provide rich and important information about the experiences of teachers engaging in partisan politics in the education sub-sectors as well. Finally, a study that explores the engagement in partisan politics of workers in other sectors of the Bangladeshi economy, and how such engagement might influence national economic and social development, might be quite helpful.

Conclusion

This study concludes that university teachers' engagement in partisan politics in Bangladesh has

influenced their professional practices in several ways. The participants agreed that the 1973 Public University Ordinance appeared to have created the opportunity for university teachers to become engaged in partisan politics; however, they suggested that teachers should focus much more on their professional duties and responsibilities than on those politics.

Furthermore, Bangladesh is an economically deprived country with a limited land area and limited natural resources, but with a dense population. In such a case, human resources become a primary resource, and teachers' roles in developing these human resources are crucial. Therefore, we believe that the Bangladeshi government should seriously reflect on what it and its citizens can do to develop a productive workforce in the 21st century. In addition, the government should seriously consider addressing teachers' demands for increased support in order to enhance their capabilities, capacities, and professional development, in contrast to encouraging teachers to engage in partisan politics. At the same time, in order to attract competent, qualified teachers, the Bangladeshi government should consider ways to make its teaching profession more attractive through a review of its salary structures and incentives.

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MOHAMMAD OMAR SHIDDIKE is a PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. His specialization is teaching in higher education and teacher engagement. Mohammad's current research is focused on faculty engagement in professional development and the effect on higher education. His research has focused on adult learning, effective teaching, and faculty contributions to their professional fields. Mohammad has taught undergraduates and graduate classes in Bangladesh. Mohammad is the author of 29 books in Canada, Germany, and Bangladesh. Many of these publications have been adopted as official texts for various degree programs by the Ministry of Education of Bangladesh. Mohammad Shiddike holds two Master's degrees in Business and Management from Bangladesh and a Masters of Education from Canada.

DR. ABU BOCKARIE is an Associate Professor of Education at the University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. Before joining the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina in fall 1998, Dr. Bockarie worked as a Research Associate at the Center for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. Dr. Bockarie's research interests center on exploring learning outcomes. His research focus includes peace education, particularly in

developing countries, vocational and technical education and training, human resources development, literacy training, lifelong learning, innovations in instruction and learning, faculty and student conceptions of teaching and learning, training of trainers, academy-industry relations, work-based training, and educational and training policy analysis. He is currently researching faculty and student conceptions on teaching and learning in higher education in developing countries.