

# THE EMERGENCE OF NEW STRATEGIC BUSINESS MODELS FOR HEIS: EVIDENCE FROM BANGLADESH

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## ABSTRACT

*No one thought about such a global pandemic situation. Coronavirus pandemic has made social distancing an inevitable new-norm. Education institutions seem to be a high-risk site for the spread of the virus as students used to behave in close community proximity in school, college, and university campuses in Bangladesh and elsewhere. In such a situation, the emergence of new strategic business models for the education sector, especially for the higher education sub-sector, has become a must. The study has focused on why and how the business strategy of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Bangladesh has changed during the pandemic. What new models have emerged and what are their implications? The research, based on the structural contingency and population ecology theories, has followed focused synthesis and content analysis methods.*

**Keywords:** AIUB, Business-Model, Competitive-Advantage, Covid-19, Strategic.

## INTRODUCTION

The effect of societal disruption concerning the spreading of infectious diseases was reported as one of the highest-ranked global risks (The World Economic Forum, 2019). The consequences of pandemic outbreaks repeatedly paid attention in debates on economic and public health policy in recent past years (Van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020). Bill Gates in his 2015 TED Talk, for example, predicted that “*If anything kills over 10 million people in the next few decades; it is most likely to be a highly infectious virus rather than a war*” (Gates, 2015).

Despite the facts mentioned above, no health scientist, economist, or business analyst got anticipated such type of long-term disruption of the world that has radically changed the world dynamics, and its working circumstances, underlying forces, professional attitudes, and emotional responses. Life and livelihood have become a tradeoff for the majority of the people in the globe. Education institutions seem to be a high-risk site for the spread of the novel coronavirus as students used to behave in close community proximity in school, college, and university campuses in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the world.

In such a situation, the rise of new business models for the education sector becomes necessary. But it is not as simple as is thought. Different countries have experienced differently. Primary and secondary education sub-sectors in Bangladesh, particularly in its rural areas, are not built on a solid foundation to cope with the standard contingency factors, while the current situation seems to be very rock and hard. Even many higher education institutions in Bangladesh might have faced tough experiences to respond timely to the call for the emergence of a new strategic business model to encounter the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Both the rapid technological advantages and an increasing amount of environmental disruptiveness made the organizations all over the world strategically agile and contingency

plan focused since the early 21st century. Adult pupils in the 21st century, particularly university students around the globe including Bangladesh, seem naturally techno-friendly. Flexibility, liveliness, and resiliency have become essential competencies for them to succeed. Thus, the management of higher education institutions is supposed to be agile and resilient and built on information communication technology and collaborative network efforts, particularly in pandemic and uncertain times. Talukdar (2020a) opines that "uncertain time calls for agile management and adaptation of contingency plan." In such a context, the emergence of new strategic business models for the higher education sub-sector becomes a must.

The study shows the essence and skeleton of the alternative or new strategic business models for higher education institutions in Bangladesh considering the current global pandemic situation. It examines the model fitness and relevance in the context of the country. This study has documented American International University-Bangladesh's (AIUB's) experience as an example of successful shifting with the new strategic business model in the country.

The pandemic might have reinforced sooner or later all sectors anywhere in the world to explore alternative business models. Eventually, sectorial and country contextual reality, organizational structural variations, management agility, and strategic lenses, as well as competitive advantages of institutions lead to developing a tailor-made strategic approach for each of the institutions based on the alternative strategic business model-frame of a sector. Higher education sub-sector all over the world has enabled a digitized interactive set-up as an alternative medium to traditional in-class learning environments.

In this connection, it is important to examine why and how the business strategy of higher education institutions in Bangladesh has changed during the pandemic. What new models have emerged and what are their implications? To what extent higher education institutions in Bangladesh have succeeded or failed to respond timely to the call for the emergence of new strategic business models to encounter the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Also, it is imperative to explore why a change in strategy seems required to adopt in the alternative strategic business model of a higher education institution in Bangladesh and how it has affected the business outcome of it.

Following this comprehensive introduction, the paper has addressed the theoretical-base of the study, methodology, and scope, and analyzed the coronavirus pandemic situation and contextual reality of Bangladesh, followed by a discussion on business strategy and model. It has then documented the new strategic business model-frame for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Bangladesh, and briefly acknowledged the transformation of the AIUB business model as a demonstratively successful experience in response to the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

## **THEORETICAL FRAME AND METHODOLOGY**

According to van Zanten & van Tulder (2020), COVID-19 stresses that "health, social inclusion, economic development, and ecological sustainability are not only deeply entwined in the present stage of globalization but are also accompanied by increasing risks that even threaten the stability and resilience of the whole system." Global contingency factors and disruptions continued to increase since the 2001-attack on the World Trade Center. Continued disruption dynamics bring the concern to light that "repeated systemic crises are inevitable if open societies are unable to transform from fragile into more sustainable and resilient economies" (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020). These also lead the 21st-century institutions to be both resilient and adaptive, and at the same time, to keep the external concerns and open system

organizational theoretic locus in front. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are no exception in this regard.

Baum & Rowley (2005) opine that the open system perspective of an organization emphasizes the “*Relationship and interdependencies between organizations and environments.*” They furthermore observe that “*Organizations are adaptive and interdependent systems, comprised of various interrelated–possibly conflicting subsystems–attempting to meet and influence the dynamic demands of the environment.*” Also, Jofre (2011) reveals that “*The theoretical framework of open systems has been broadly inspired by general systems theory and by cybernetics from the mid-50s to late- 70s.*”

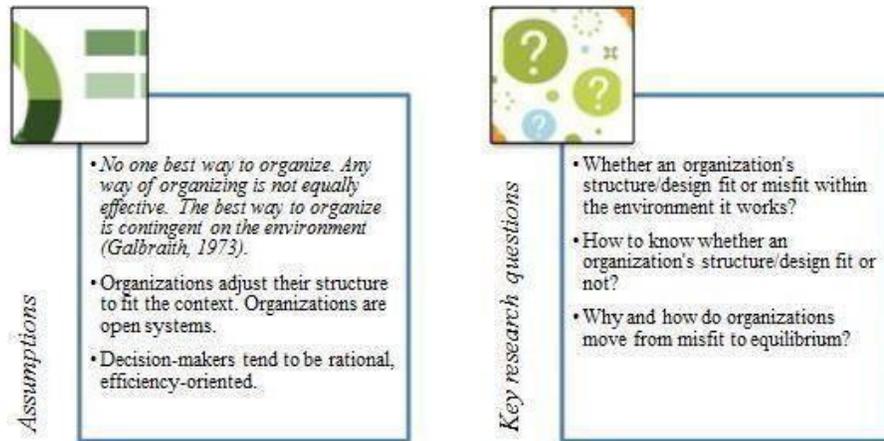
To the extent that the open system is concerned, “*The best way to organize depends on the nature of the environment to which the organization relates*” (Scott, 1992). According Talukdar (2020a):

An organization as an open system constantly exchanges feedbacks with its internal and external environments and analyzes those feedbacks to adjust to the internal system to achieve its system goals. As per the study of organizational theory concerns, an organization can be either open or closed system-oriented. Unlike the closed system, an open system has to deal with both the inside and outside stakeholders and environments including internal shareholders, professionals, customers, competitors, budgetary economy, and political, economic, ecological, and technological factors, and health, security, and societal aspects.”

The mainstream theories of organizations as an open system include new institutional theory, resource dependence theory, structural contingency theory, population ecology theory, inter-organizational relationships theory. Nonetheless, this research is founded on the “structural contingency” and “population ecology” theories and has followed a qualitative methodology with the “focused synthesis” and “content analysis” methods.

## **Theoretical Base**

Talukdar (2020a) specifically addresses the significance of the external concerns and contingency factors, resource dependency, interconnection, and collaboration, and continued healthy survival of organizations, and appreciates “how and to what extent a robust contingency plan and agile management can be responsive to encounter and overcome emergency and pandemic situations in a world of changing environments and evolving business climates.” Consistent with Talukdar (2020a), the current study is based on the “structural contingency” theory and “population ecology” theory. Figure 1 below demonstrates the basic assumptions, and key research questions of the “structural contingency” theory.

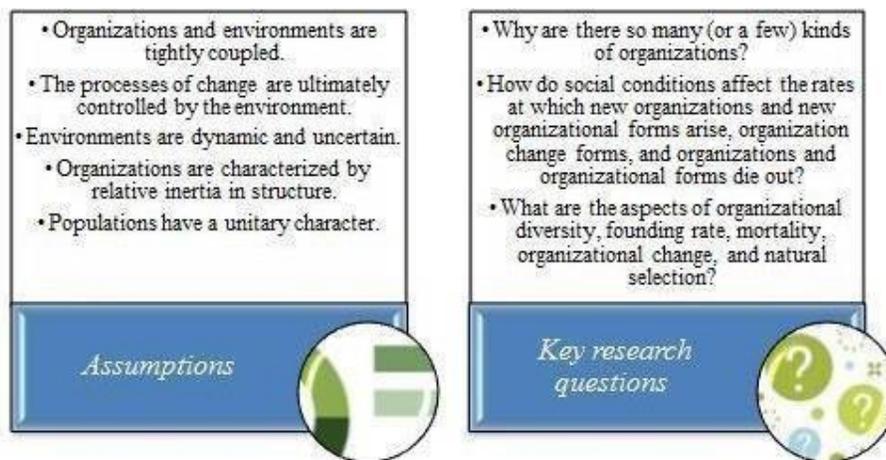


Source: Adapted from Talukdar, 2020a

**FIGURE 1**  
**ASSUMPTIONS AND KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE "STRUCTURALCONTINGENCY" THEORY**

Talukdar (2020a) furthermore explains the "population ecology" theory in a way that the "aspects of diversity, founding rate, mortality, change, and natural selection of organizations depend on the environmental conditionality and contingency factors."

Such an open system organizational theory was first set off by Hannan & Freeman (1977) in their persuasive article titled "The population ecology of organizations." Figure 2 shows the basic assumptions, and key research questions of the "population ecology" theory.



Source: Adapted from talukdar, 2020a

**FIGURE 2**  
**ASSUMPTIONS AND KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE "POPULATION ECOLOGY" THEORY**

## Study Methodology and Scope

The study has followed "focused synthesis" and "content analysis" methods for assessing the agility and resilience of the management of higher education institutions in Bangladesh in response to the call for the emergence of new strategic business models to encounter the COVID-19 pandemic situation. It has also applied a living example of the successful shifting of a higher education institution in Bangladesh with the new strategic business model of AIUB.

*Focused synthesis* indicates gathering, documenting and verifying data from a wide range of sources including printed and unpublished official papers, staff memo, and discussion with key stakeholders (Talukdar, 2012), while *content analysis* refers to "classify the patterns, trends, and configurations, and implied meaning and implications of the 'selected contents' used in documented communications. It requires the systematic collection of information and data from a set of contents, which can be verbal or non-verbal" (Talukdar, 2020a).

The scope of the study limits to scrutinizing the new business model-frame and strategy of higher education institutions in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. It also includes presenting the success story of AIUB, and how it has become the contingency management model champion in Bangladesh by shifting with a strategic drive within days of the initial COVID-19 outbreak in the country. The research was designed in September 2020, relevant contents and data were collected in October 2020, while the article was written in November 2020.

## THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

This is an exceptional global pandemic. The cost of the pandemic is huge, and it is too prolonged. The real complexity of the pandemic is too stiff, evidence of which is found in a recent commentary, published in the Telegraph, coauthored by Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-general of the World Health Organization. The Telegraph commentary is titled "A global pandemic requires a world effort to end it none of us will be safe until everyone is safe" with the subtitle "Access to vaccines, tests, and treatments for everyone who needs them is the only way out – this is a historic test for global cooperation." According to Leyen & Ghebreyesus (2020):

*"Worldwide, trends are worrying. Close to a million lives have been directly lost to the disease and essential health services are disrupted for millions. With jobs at risk, governments have pumped more than \$10 trillion into economies to safeguard livelihoods. And people around the world have made personal sacrifices to their daily lives for the greater good."*

## Implications in HEIs

The sudden spread of COVID-19 around the world leads to grow a foremost disruptive environment in the higher education institutions across the globe and Bangladesh. The pandemic threatens every aspect of university life, from admission, new intake and enrollment to academic and campus management, faculty research to knowledge generation and management, curriculum development to teaching, student assessment to results, and graduation to job placement.

According to Tripathi, Wolfgang & Amann, the COVID-19 has obstructed the energy, employment, education, agriculture, and other areas of the global economy, and the emotional well-being of the citizens. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are no exception. UNESCO

estimates that over 1.5 billion students in 165 countries in the world are out of school due to the novel coronavirus pandemic (Tripathi & Amann, 2020).

### **The Contextual reality of Bangladesh**

The sturdiness of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh H.E. Sheikh Hasina seems to be appreciable. She has taken the country to a new height. Her strategic lens and determination in dealing with the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic situation in Bangladesh are commendable. But she seemed to be alone in the political leadership of the Government in fighting the pandemic in the early stage.

Content analysis (for instance, OPED pieces of Talukdar, 2020b & 2020c) and observations reveal the fact that there was a lack of coordination amongst the relevant ministers responsible for tackling widely spreading the coronavirus in the country and for providing necessary support to the public in such a critical situation. It seemed a primary failure of the professional bureaucracy of the ministries concerned. Sound management of the chiefly concerned ministry (*i.e.*, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare - MHFW) and inter-coordination of key other ministries appeared to be missing. For example, shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for doctors, nurses, and other medical staff members, and crisis with the virus-testing-tool and ventilators conveyed the impression of a management failure of the health-related ministry. The MHFW took very meager preparation for such a mass-life-threatening situation. Did it hold any contingency or emergency plan? Field level hospitals seemed to be more unprepared, which was evident when a coronavirus-affected medical doctor did not find the necessary treatment facility in a regional hospital (*i.e.*, Sylhet hospital) of the country.

Talukdar (2020c) reveals that "funding is not the main issue for this ministry. For more than a decade, given to the wisdom of a visionary head of the Government, the health budget has been considered one of the priority allocations in Bangladesh's budget." Moreover, development partners' response seems to be positive as well in this regard. The World Bank, for instance, has sanctioned a US\$ 100 million co-operation scheme to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MHFW) to fight the pandemic situation. Talukdar (2020c) furthermore, unveils a critical truth:

"Corruption research, victims' claim, and public perception suggest that the main problems of the ministry are system loss, bureaucratic interests related to procurement, material constraints, and negligence of official duties, poor public health services, political and administrative failure to create a robust accountability framework and to build a sturdy contingency plan to resolve crises"

Nonetheless, Talukdar (2020b) observes that the Prime Minister's command established on the government health, emergency, and law and order service providers, while Talukdar (2020c) reports that the number of coronavirus-affected patients in the country is still limited but the mortality rate among the infected is the highest in the world. COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh has become a serious nuisance due to irresponsible behaviors of some public ignoring the standard norms and practices in combating coronavirus pandemic. Also, those who are cautious have found hat-bazaars very unhealthy and unprotected. Talukdar (2020c) unveils another crucial truth that has emerged from the implication of the global pandemic situation in the country:

"Throughout the last decade, the development of the country is indeed rapidly accelerated by the outstanding influence of the far-sighted leadership of the Prime Minister (PM). But sector-based strong contingency plans with appropriate resource back-up for facing adversity,

and their efficient implementation frameworks have not been shaped to the expected level. This is practicably due to a large part of the leadership and administration of the government possesses a lack of moral or strategic competencies."

It seemed that the country did not hold affordability of continuing long-term lockdown as it continued to affect the livelihoods of poor and middle-income people seriously. Notably for short-term support, the Government targeted the country's operating core and most helpless segments of the society. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh unveiled Taka 72,750 crore (USD 8,573 million) stimulus packages to counterbalance the negative impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic. The Government, however, has realized the fact that on the road to recovery of the continual losses and lifting the missing middle class of the state, initiating a long-term plan is a must. The long-run economic restructuring, as well as recovery, is a strategic issue that necessitates strategic cooperation efforts of public, private, and civil society organizations, and development partners.

### **Realization of HEIs in Bangladesh**

An understanding of the prolonged existence of the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced all sectors in Bangladesh to search for alternative business models as an immediate effect. So was true for the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the country. The COVID-19, a novel coronavirus, became a catalyst for HEIs to make them focused on real-time online teaching-learning platforms, and to make their education management more agile and responsive.

In this connection, it is important to examine to what extent higher education institutions in Bangladesh have succeeded or failed to respond timely to the call for the emergence of new strategic business models to encounter the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Also, it is vital to explore why a change in strategy needed to adopt the alternative strategic business model for a higher education institution in Bangladesh and how it has affected the business outcome of it.

## **BUSINESS STRATEGY AND MODEL**

Although Arnaldo C. Hax's "Delta Model" of strategy (Hax, 2010), challenges the conventional view of strategy and business model and stands for transformation and change, as well as focuses on reinventing the business strategy, this study still suggests the goal of the strategy is to create sustained competitive advantage for the firm. But the study appreciates the mindset of the "Delta Model"—*i.e.*, seeing the strategy as an approach of cooperation and collaboration over the strategy as an aggressive war with the rivalry firms, and focusing on the creativity, innovation, and uniqueness instead of imitated competition or "mimetic isomorphism" of DiMaggio & Powell (1983). Such uniqueness—*i.e.*, value proposition or offering clients truly unique, impact-focused, and distinctive something—is termed in this article as a base for the competitive advantage. Thus, the business strategy and model eventually become impact-focused and adaptive to the changing circumstances. If the new circumstance or environment seems too stringent

or disruptive, the emergence of a new business model becomes obvious for a particular institution, even for a sector.

## Business Strategy

In the business domain, strategies are a blend of deliberations based on the novel idea and emerging situation, and boldness considering the experience and actions. Thus, firms modify existing strategies, considering the evolving facts and contingency factors, and wisdom of organizational leadership. Regardless of the bases, strategies in business commonly seek the construction of advantages, while each advantage needs to consider a potential disadvantage (Jofre, 2011). Table 1 below shows the potential advantages and disadvantages of strategies in organizations.

Strategic Factor	Advantage	Disadvantage
Setting Direction	Sets the directions to the future balancing internal and external factors.	Following a fixed course of directions seems to be a blind approach with hidden dangers.
Focusing Effort	It increases coordination of activity reducing overall efforts and detrimental effects of chaos.	Excess of focus reduces the chance of spontaneous actions needed for adaptation to change.
Defining Organization	It gives meaning to the organization and its people defining the purpose of being.	Increases the chance of becoming too simplistic and stereotyped.
Achieving Consistency	It reduces uncertainty and provides order facilitating action.	It reduces the chance of creative actions emerging from uncertainty and chaos.

Source: Mintzberg et al., 1998; jofre, 2011

Mintzberg suggests four key advantages of strategies in businesses - *i.e.*, setting direction, focusing effort, defining the organization, and achieving consistency. For each strategic advantage to achieve, an organization might however consider a potential disadvantage. Table 1 above demonstrates how Jofre (2011) has modified Mintzberg et al. (1998) strategic-frame to show the pros and cons of strategies in organizations.

## Business Model

A Business Model portrays “the rationale of how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value,” while the Business Model Canvas indicates “a tool for describing, analyzing, and designing business models” (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

*“We believe a business model can best be described through nine basic building blocks that show the logic of how a company intends to make money. The nine blocks cover the four main areas of a business: customers, offer, infrastructure, and financial viability. The business model is like a blueprint for a strategy to be implemented through organizational structures, processes, and systems”* (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

According to Osterwalder (2013), *“The Business Model Canvas as opposed to the traditional, intricate business plan - helps organizations conduct structured, tangible, and strategic conversations around new businesses or existing ones.”* It is a strategic management approach and smart prototype for developing new or adapting existing business models and strategies. Barquet et al. (2011) expose that it was applied and tested in many organizations, for example, in IBM and Ericsson, and was being successfully used to label and influence business models to create new strategic alternatives. Osterwalder (2013) furthermore opines that the

purpose of a Business Model Canvas is to help firms move beyond product-centric thinking and focus on business model thinking. His study reveals that “leading global companies like GE, P&G, and Nestlé use the canvas to manage strategy or create new growth engines, while start-ups use it in their search for the right business model.”

A business model is closely linked to the all strategies of an organization. Eventually, it is resultant from the business strategies of an organization. The reverse is also true - *i.e.*, organizational strategies may also follow the business model. It is the design parameter for generating, appending, and delivering value proposition and producing the necessary revenue to cover the cost, make a profit, and continue growth.

It emphasizes the internal and external stakeholders' involvement, satisfaction, and appreciation. Also, it regenerates and reinvests to keep competitive, when required. Competitive advantage is central to the strategies and business model of an organization. Table 2 below shows the frame of a business model with its four core elements – *i.e.*, customer value proposition, value chain, profit formula, and competitive strategy Table 2.

<b>Core elements</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
Customer value proposition	A customer value proposition refers to explaining how an organization or institution is likely to focus and handle a customer need, through a product or service it offers.
Value chain	A value chain refers to shaping processes, innovation, technological intervention, other resources, partners, and association with the value network to encounter the value proposition.
Profit formula	A profit formula refers to articulating a formula or strategy on how an organization or institution can generate sufficient revenue to cover the cost, make a profit, and continue growth.
Competitive strategy	A competitive strategy refers to detailing how an organization or institution can create a competitive advantage and become a champion in a particular area with innovation, technological intervention, cost management, and leadership focus through competing rivals and defending its position in the value network.

According to Sheets et al. (2012) "Business model frameworks have become a cornerstone of business strategy development and analysis across a wide variety of industries and sectors, and have more recently entered the discussion related to higher education. Multisided and unbundled open business models - especially when combined with facilitated network models - hold great promise for improving the performance of higher education. That promise flows from their potential to achieve enormous economies of scale and scope, and in the process, enable genuine personalization in learning and credentialing along with comparable improvements in research and development and business management."

The blueprint of the foremost value proposition, value chain, profit formula, and competitive strategy must fit collectively within a consistent and heightened economic reasoning to function well as a greater organizational or institutional ecosystem (Sheets et al., 2012). In this context, neither disruptive innovation nor disruptive environment fits into the existing business model and its value network. Both require regenerating the business model and restructuring the existing value networks to drive reasonably towards the scope and scale with the emerging innovation, environment, and business context.

According to Christensen, et al. (2009), "*A value network is the context within which a firm establishes its business model and how it works with suppliers and channel partners or*

*distributors so that together they can respond profitably to the common needs of a class of customers.*" Sheets, et al. (2012) note down the fact that Christensen along with Grossman and Hwang in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century developed a meaningful analytical framework that highlighted four crucial aspects of disruptive innovation: "technological enablers, business model innovations, value network adjustments, and the standards and regulatory environment."

### **Theoretical Relevance**

The four aspects of disruptive innovation are equally applicable for the disruptive environment or pandemic situation, while the relevance of the open system organizational theories seems to be evident. Thus, the survival of the institutions in a changing environment depends on the management agility and strategic contingency plans of institutions that lead to develop new business models or to adapt to the emergent business model-frame evolved at the market in an emergency. The COVID-19 pandemic situation seems to create such a context, while a large number of private universities mushroomed in Bangladesh in a very opportune time have now faced a quandary to survive in this emergency moment. It shows the relevance of the "population ecology" theory in this context.

The relevance of "structural contingency" theory at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is evident in Sheets, et al. (2012) which is pertinent in the case of Bangladesh as well:

"Many of the higher education institutions are under considerable pressure to offer a large menu of programs and courses. Yet these institutions find it difficult to acquire the faculty expertise and organizational resources needed to ensure high quality across such a broad range of specialties. One result of this shortcoming is a combination of strong and weak programs. Given their current business models, these institutions face a real dilemma - they can achieve greater economies of scale only by sacrificing economies of scope."

Analysis of the aforementioned content of Sheets, et al. (2012) exposes the truth that HEIs globally and in Bangladesh are concerned for the fitness of organizations' structures, business models, and re-design of the model considering the external environment concerns and internal capability. Talukdar (2020a) furthermore explains it:

"Although a significant amount of pressure is evident to offer a large list of options of programs and courses, considering the real-world difficulty to secure the faculty expertise and institutional resources required to safeguard the quality standard of the programs, the HEIs sacrifice economies of scope to a certain extent and focus on the economies of scale to a great extent. This means HEIs are concerned about the dilemma of the business model's misfit, and thus they wish to set the equilibrium between the economies of scale and economies of scope in this context."

### **THE EMERGENCE OF NEW BUSINESS MODELS**

A 2011-write-up of Harvard Business Review reveals through research and experiment for more than a decade, on both mature and emerging markets, that successful new models at the onset must consist of three fundamental steps: i) Identify an important unmet job that a target customer needs to be addressed; ii) Perform that job profitably at a price the customer is willing to pay; and iii) Get the model carefully implemented and evolved by constantly testing assumptions and making adjustments through lessons learning process (Eyring et al., 2011).

Besides, for an emergent model, focusing on the value chain and competitive advantage

through shaping a process with innovations and technological interventions is highly important. Johnson et al. (2008) in the opening statement of their piece present a real-world example in this regard:

"In 2003, Apple introduced the iPod with the iTunes store, revolutionizing portable entertainment, creating a new market, and transforming the company. In just three years, the iPod/iTunes combination became a nearly \$10 billion product, accounting for almost 50% of Apple's revenue. Apple's market capitalization catapulted from around \$1 billion in early 2003 to over \$150 billion by late 2007."

### **The New Business Model for HEIs**

The coronavirus pandemic is incredibly affecting the education sector at large alongside the disrupted global job market and economy. The Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are no exception from that. UN Academic Impact in the opening statement of the Tripathi & Amann's (2020) contribution reveals the fact that the epidemic has forced the worldwide academic community to explore new ways of teaching and learning, e.g., distance and online education. This is challenging with the emotional, physical, and economic difficulties for both students and teachers. Also, the future is uncertain for everyone, particularly for millions of students who are graduating this year in a disruptive world economy.

The new business model for HEIs, encompassing a unique set of strategies, has become inevitable that have grown from the conviction that circumstances being experienced at higher education institutions in the globe are such magnitude that exiting business models of HEIs have become worthless. Moreover, the presence of the internet, and the emergence of information communication technology, and the incredible e-learning technologies - e.g. zoom, microsoft teams, etc., support strongly transformation and change in this regard. With the global scale, the advantage of the emerging business model framework for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is based on its compatibility to compete in a global marketplace, and on the contingency-plan with a digital educational platform.

### **Evidence from HEIs in Bangladesh**

In the case of Bangladesh, while all institutions canceled in-person classes, gradually most of them have been moving to online-only instruction. Nonetheless, as the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exam was pending, the new intake scheme for undergraduate programs seemed to face a serious challenge as the fresh intakes used to come from the higher secondary school graduates. The Education Ministry of the Government of Bangladesh realized the problem and has recently addressed and solved it with an alternative path. According to a leading daily, The Daily Star (October 08, 2020) report:

"The Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and its equivalent examinations of this year have been canceled due to health safety concerns. Instead, candidates would be evaluated based on their results in Junior School Certificate (JSC), Secondary School Certificate (SSC), and their equivalent tests."

Earlier, the Government on March 22, 2020, following the closure of all educational institutions on March 17, 2020, postponed the HSC and equivalent exams scheduled for April 1, 2020, for which more than 13.65 lakh students got registered to sit for the exams. The Education Minister of Bangladesh opines that *"we have learned from many countries like India, China, South Africa, and the Caribbean nations as they also canceled their public exams to avoid*

*community transmission of the virus*" (The Business Standard, 07 October 2020). Last year, the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exam result was published on 17th July 2019 but this year the result would be released in December 2020 due to such a critical situation with the coronavirus pandemic.

Since the novel coronavirus pandemic has created considerable financial instability in the country, serious concern also extends to the financial future of higher education institutions considering the potential reductions of revenue of such institutions. Universities in Bangladesh have faced overwhelming challenges to the long-established business models due to the extreme outbreak of the coronavirus and fewer health-care facilities in the country in this regard. HEIs are getting this challenging climate worsened, as the pandemic has created substantial financial instability in the country that leads to the threat of massive reductions of revenue of higher education institutions, in a time when the recent past trends of cost for providing higher education facilities seemed to rise. To deal with these challenges successfully in such an evolving turbulent environment, many universities in Bangladesh are responding to the call for the emergence of new business models.

The business models and their competitive configurations, value networks, technological enablers, and the standards and regulatory environment of higher education institutions in Bangladesh during this global pandemic situation must be measured examining the strengths and weaknesses of HEIs, and opportunities and threats of this disruptive business environment for the higher education segment of the education sector. In such a context, a new generic business model frame has emerged for higher education institutions in Bangladesh. Shows in Table 3 establishes the frame and base of the new strategic-business model for HEIs in Bangladesh.

Lamagna (2020) opines that unfortunately, most higher education institutions in Bangladesh struggle with having a remote workforce for the duration of the shutdown.

Unlike the tech-sector, HIEs are not built for remote work and might have little experience in managing it. Nonetheless, the higher education sub-sector has enabled a digitized interactive as well as versatile set-up as an alternate medium to traditional in-class teaching and learning environs. The new platform has safeguarded the matured students from incurring the loss of their semester, and by getting themselves engaged with the peer groups and teaching-learning community during such an unavoidable isolated lifestyle.

Lamagna (2020) furthermore opines that "this evolving situation will not only be vastly disruptive but also a paradigm shift in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)." The new business model and evolving critical experience of HEIs might lead to creating post-pandemic opportunities in continuing with the new model in parallel to the traditional model with a sustained competitive advantage.

Not all universities could go virtual, even many of them might have not tried to adapt to the emerging generic business model-frame on the onset of closed down of the education institutions in Bangladesh in mid-March 2020. Whereas from March 20, 2020, as pointed out by Lamagna (2020), American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) successfully shifted all its classes online, for both undergraduate and graduate programs of all four faculties of the university, though enabling students and teachers to conduct and undertake their classes using the most secured and advanced versatile technological platform Microsoft TEAMS application.

<b>Table 3</b>	
<b>EMERGING STRATEGIC BUSINESS MODEL-FRAME FOR HEIS IN BANGLADESH</b>	
Customer value proposition	Value chain
Shield the graduate and undergraduate students from suffering the loss of their semesters.	Enable a digitized interactive as well as versatile set-up and live-online learning environment. Engage students with peer groups and teaching-learning community during such an isolated lifestyle in a pandemic situation. Involve faculty members and students with national and global webinar platforms, knowledge hubs, and research Networks.
Profit formula	Competitive strategy
Some schools of the particular private universities are publishing reduced and affordable semester-wise tuition fees, while many other private universities are offering much lower tuition prices. Most of the private universities are focusing on the cost-management through increased operational efficiencies and by limiting back-office functions and rearranging online support. Some universities are streamlining a live-online pedagogical environment to keep exiting students, while a few are pursuing to reach more new students without incurring additional costs of facilities, curriculum, and faculty. Many schools are avoiding or limiting part-time faculties. Some universities are focusing on developing new sources of revenue by adding new degree levels, for instance, short courses, and professional diploma programs to attract new different kinds of students and professionals.	Many universities are using Zoom or Google Meeting; while a few are using Microsoft Teams. The latter holds some competitive advantage over others for its technological advancement. Also, some private universities made agreements with different mobile operating companies to support with economic internet data to students, while for public universities, the Government lately established a contract with the Government-run mobile operator "Tele-talk."

According to Lamagna (2020) on the onset of the shutdown of universities in Bangladesh in the mid of the spring 2019-20 Semester, while AIUB initiated the new business model, the situation of it appeared that:

"Approximately 10,000 active student users along with around 650 faculty members of AIUB are accessing this online platform, utilizing it to its full capacity for online class lectures and team-based work projects. Faculty members are delivering lectures through video conferencing with embedded PowerPoint presentations, whiteboard incorporations, and desktop sharing options. Students can communicate with them through video, audio, or message boards for queries, clarifications, and class participation, as required and appropriate. They can also participate in the quizzes and assignments through this platform. Several online meetings with the academic and administrative-support staffs are held regularly."

Eventually, AIUB has become the pioneer and market champion in this regard. Participant observation reveals that while AIUB finished the online classes of the spring semester in 2020 on time, the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh did not allow it to make the final assessment until the UGC made a new policy framework, and enabled standards and regulatory environment for higher education institutions in Bangladesh in sustaining aspects of the new model evolved. Following the AIUB, some other leading private universities started the journey to go online and adapted the new strategic business model-frame with a little tailor-made approach. Almost all private universities in Bangladesh shifted online from the beginning of the summer semester in 2020. But the public universities in Bangladesh

remained behind until mid of the summer semester in late August 2020. Since then they gradually started to run online classes, and still many of them are in the dry run stage.

Unlike private universities, public universities in Bangladesh do not seem to be fully concerned with the emergent strategic-business model-frame. The reason behind it seems that they neither need to be concerned about the profit formula or revenue generation nor any necessity to think much to create a competitive advantage. They get sufficient funding support from the Government even during the pandemic situation. Eventually, they are neither contingency plan focused nor agile management centric.

Observation unveils that the emerging business model-frame for higher education institutions in Bangladesh during novel coronavirus pandemic has deeply focused on the knowledge transfer aspect of universities in Bangladesh – *i.e.*, teaching, learning, and credentialing. There are two other aspects of higher education institutional management *i.e.*, research and knowledge generation, and business management. Central to the business management of HEIs in Bangladesh is enrollment management. According to Sheets et al. (2012):

"Enrollment management involves the outreach, recruitment, selection, enrollment, and "on-boarding" of students so that higher education institutions have the appropriate numbers and types of qualified students to ensure high levels of financial and operational performance and to maintain the institutional brand."

Christensen et al. (2011) however, argue that higher education institutions experience two different types of business under one roof - *i.e.*, research that operates as a "solutions shop," and learning and credentialing that is a "value-adding process."

Observations support that in the area of research and knowledge-generating, some leading private universities in Bangladesh, for instance, BRAC University and AIUB, have focused on the co-creation, partnership building, and establishment of collaboration with the international academic community. With this connection, some universities are jointly conducting or independently hosting a series of webinars to share knowledge, idea, intellectual resources, and to disseminate their research outputs. A substantial number of faculty members of different universities are conducting a series of research by using online-resources and distance research platforms and tools. Thus, they are getting a notable number of research papers and opinion articles published and adding value to the knowledge domain of the HEIs. Besides, few schools of universities are redesigning course contents and curriculums and developing e-learning resources.

Observations furthermore reveal that regarding business management most of the private universities are trying to focus on efficient enrollment management and operational cost-effectiveness. Some are, however, additionally paying attention to make differentiation with the leadership promise, and to enable virtual technological innovation. Noticeably, competitive advantage concern with business management is being evident only at the private universities in the case of Bangladesh during this global pandemic situation.

## CONCLUSION

Nobody thought about the situation in which the current set of circumstances persists. Almost nine months passed away since higher education institutions in Bangladesh physically got shut-down in response to the call for the Government's directives. Observation of this study has complimented Talukdar (2020a) by supporting the fact that generally the management of HEIs in Bangladesh is neither built on robust information communication technology and collaborative network efforts nor much agile and resilient. Many universities have failed to

respond timely to the call for the emergence of a new strategic business model to encounter the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Public universities, for example, have strived to adopt the new business model-frame for HEIs very recently just from mid of the summer semester of 2020.

A substantial number of private universities mushroomed in a very opportune time have now faced a dilemma to survive in this crisis moment. Even though they have tried to imitate the new business model-frame with a similar customer value proposition and value chain, but such mimetic isomorphism has failed to re-generate competitive advantage through appropriate profit strategy and competitive strategy. Some private universities, however, quickly adopted the new business model-frame and successfully created a competitive advantage through proper profit strategy and fitting competitive strategy.

American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) in this regard has become a role model by shifting its business model with a strategic sparkle within days of the initial outbreak of novel coronavirus in the country. AIUB has become the market champion through technological robustness, business model innovation, value network adjustment, new standards and regulatory framework adaptation, and operational efficiency as well as outcome effectiveness. The real story of its success, however, counts on management agility, impact leadership, and study contingency plan. While the management agility and strategic contingency plans of institutions turn out to be instrumental for surviving with the changing environment and emergency (Talukdar, 2020a), not many HEIs in Bangladesh hold such strategic competency. The absence of such fitness put them difficult to adapt quickly in such an evolving and pandemic situation.

Now it is additionally proved that higher education institutions in Bangladesh and elsewhere need to be resilient, agile, sturdy contingency plan-driven, and adaptive with the environmental concerns. Thus, this study reveals the relevance of the open system organizational theories, especially the "structural contingency", and "population ecology" theories. Finally, the study complements the fact that regardless of the pandemic situation quickly diminishes or not, the habits, regenerated livelihood competencies, and lifestyles are already altered. Thus, the new normal situation in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the world is likely to open new insights, avenues, and opportunities, alongside the post-pandemic challenges. Nonetheless, a further study requires in this regard in satisfying the following questions: How well the institutions could have taken competitive advantage of the evolving opportunities in the new normal situation arising from the global disruption or pandemic? How to create some impact-focused solutions towards deeply engaging faculty members and students in learning, research, and academic interactions in the new possibility?

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