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Institutional Challenges and Strategic Pathways of Bangladesh University of Professionals to Academic Excellence

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) represents a distinctive model of higher education governance in Bangladesh, where administration is largely guided by the Armed Forces (AF) personnel. While this model has ensured discipline, stability, and an apolitical campus environment, its long-term implications for sustaining academic excellence remain insufficiently examined. This study aims to explore the institutional challenges faced by BUP and to identify strategic pathways for sustaining and enhancing its academic performance. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study draws on key informant interviews, focus group discussions and an extensive review of secondary sources, institutional documents, policies and relevant literature. The findings reveal that military-led governance contributes to administrative efficiency and order, but frequent changes in leadership limit academic participation in governance. In addition, the fragmented research outputs and regulatory complexities with affiliated institutions hinder academic excellence and continuity. The study recommends longer tenures for key leadership roles, stronger academic-administrative integration, consolidation of research including outputs of affiliates under a unified institutional banner, enhanced civil-military cooperation and cohesion. It emphasized on maintaining existing apolitical status, discipline, and dress codes, ease up the posting of the AF officers to BUP. Moreover, it recommends to periodically review and implement the existing academic strategic plan vis-à-vis pathways to have a multi-entity academic environment, including an active and output-based research center, with steps to galvanise efforts of alumni with some related issues. The novelty of this study lies in its focused institutional analysis of a military-administered public university in Bangladesh, offering empirically grounded insights that extend existing debates on higher education governance beyond human resource development narratives.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) confronts a unique situation in the higher education landscape of Bangladesh, being a public university under the administration of the Armed Forces, blending civilian academic traditions with military discipline. Globally, institutions of higher education face increasing pressures to ensure academic excellence along with governance challenges, continuity of leadership, faculty development, research productivity, and regulatory complexity (Damor & Patel, 2025; De Andrade *et al.*, 2023). Military participation in university administration has been found to offer some positive impacts in terms of discipline, efficiency and leadership capacity, but it has also evoked concerned issues in terms of academic autonomy, collegial decision-making and long-term growth of scholarship (Moore, 2014; Akuegwu & Nwi-ue, 2017). Guided by the motto “Excellence through Knowledge,” BUP has been rapidly expanding its academic scope in terms of student enrolment and caters to both its military and civilian students while overseeing a substantial number of affiliated institutions (Arman, 2020). This expansion, however, has created institutional and strategic pressures of interest enough to be a subject of systematic academic

and research investigation.

Despite a growing volume of international literature on higher education governance, discipline, faculty development, and student politics (Brooks, 2016; Sawant *et al.*, 2023; Wei, 2022), limited empirical literature exists focusing on armed forces-administered universities in Bangladesh. Existing studies mostly focus on the human resources development and the administrative strengths of the military (Uddin & Kabir, 2024; Alam *et al.*, 2025), but they have insufficient focus on the internal institutional challenges that impact academic excellence, research integration, and sustainability. Limited scholarly analysis has been done about the impact on the academic outcomes of BUP based on its unique governance structure, frequent changes in administrative personnel, and regulatory responsibility over BUP’s affiliated institutions. Addressing the gap, the present study aimed to explore the institutional challenges confronting BUP and identify strategic pathways which can facilitate its long-term academic excellence which balances discipline and efficiency with academic depth, continuity and global relevance.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Higher education institutions (HEIs) face complex governance challenges, the psychological attributes of the staff, the visionary capacities, and the lack of financial endowments, which make it difficult for these institutions to pursue scholarly distinction. When compounded with political interference and the stringent regulatory mechanisms, this would further distort the administrative milieu which would further curtail the institutional autonomy and stifle innovation (Damor & Patel, 2025). In addition, HEIs face adversities that have a detrimental impact on the development of the faculty and the attendant pursuit of academic excellence. The improvement is possible through creating customised faculty development programmes and the integration of technology to meet the evolving needs of the educational system (Sawant *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, good governance and efficient management of resources are essential to encourage academic excellence; focus on digital transformation, international collaborations and professional improvement empowers institutions to be adaptive to the constantly changing landscape of education (De Andrade *et al.*, 2023).

HEIs administered by the armed forces experience a duality in the advantages and impediments while conducting their academic, research and administrative operations. They bring discipline, teamwork, problem solving and practical leadership habits that students and peers can leverage in classrooms and programmes (Sikes *et al.*, 2020; Smith & Adams, 2008). However, military administration often experiences cognitive dissonance between military socialization and civilian academic cultures, which can impede adjustment and affect campus discourse (Main *et al.*, 2019). However, military involvement in higher education administration presents both opportunities and challenges and such examples persist across the global higher education sector. For instance, at institutions like Norwich University, The Citadel, Texas A&M University of USA presidents are retired Generals. Moreover, National University of Science & Technology, Pakistan; Army Institute of Management Kolkata, India; Helmut Schmidt University (HSU) and Bundeswehr University Munich, Germany including many other universities all over the world have their academic and administrative staff drawn from the AF.

Frequent transfer of administrative personnel in the universities can significantly impact overall efficiency and productivity. This kind of policy can also create challenges in administration because it disrupts orderly operations, thus forcing other individuals to handle more tasks that take away their primary functions (Butali *et al.*, 2013; Woelert, 2023). The disruption of the regular working process and the loss of institutionalization are also risks that can negatively affect the effectiveness of the university's overall activities (C. T. D. Tran *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, collaborative initiatives, good branding and focus on interdisciplinary research and publications are some of the strategies that a university can employ to

leverage the research output of the affiliated institutions to enhance its reputation and impact of research. The establishment of partnerships with other related institutes may help in the conduction of joint research projects hence strengthening the visibility and legitimacy of the university in the academic fraternity (Walaszczyk, 2024). Joint research projects also facilitate the sharing of knowledge and innovation, such as Can Tho University used the analysis of co-authorship networks to optimise its research strategies (T. N. N. Tran *et al.*, 2024). While leveraging research output can significantly enhance a university's reputation, it is essential to recognize the challenges posed by resource limitations and administrative burdens that may hinder research productivity and collaboration efforts (Salameh *et al.*, 2022).

Maintenance of discipline is crucial in developing the culture of campuses and influencing behaviour of students, teachers and staff in institutions of higher learning. It helps to create the culture reflecting institutional and societal values, as well as facilitates the development of a stable, predictable environment that is congenial to the educational mission (Karaoulas, 2024; Wei, 2022). Discipline helps in educating appropriate behaviours and eliminating negative habits hence minimising cases of indiscipline including truancy and substance abuse (Khatun & Siddiqui, 2018). Therefore, the changing approaches of disciplinary measures, especially punitive to supportive, need to be flexible to provide better results of discipline in the modern educational environment (Karaoulas, 2024).

The importance of dress code for the university students includes several aspects such as discipline, social perception and identity with the institution. An example is that Islamic universities have dress codes to make sure that students dress in a modest way as per the religious provisions (Syafuruddin, 2025; Yunita *et al.*, 2023). The way students dress influences greatly on the first impression and impressions of other members in the academic community. Studies have shown that formal clothes can be interpreted as professional and ready, and casual clothes can be interpreted as easy to approach (Hajdú *et al.*, 2023). Dress codes are often introduced to institutions in order to minimise distractions and ensure that education is the primary focus since immodest clothes will disrupt the learning process (Ndlovu *et al.*, 2025). It is interesting to note that even a number of leading universities have implemented strict dress codes and systematic codes of conduct policies as institutional discipline. As an example, Texas A&M University (USA) does not allow strapless or tight, provocative costumes as a sign of modesty and professionalism; Bob Jones University and Brigham Young University (USA) insist on gender-related dress code and dressing performance on the occasions as a sign of modesty and cleanliness (Bob Jones University, n.d.). Les Roches Global Hospitality University (Switzerland) requires the formal dress in the daytime in order to reflect the industry norms (Les Roches, n.d.). University of

Tehran (Iran) and Islamic University of Madinah (Saudi Arabia) stipulate Islamic dress code and do not allow flashy and partying dresses or suits (Islamic University of Madinah, n.d.). The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (Kenya) has also got strict rules and regulations that concern indecent dressing and accessories. These activities underscore the world's appreciation of the fact that discipline in appearance and behaviour is central to the growth of leaders and professionals.

The student politics may hinder or persuade the development of a university, depending on several factors. However, to protect an apolitical position and, also, provide a participatory and academically conducive environment, universities can adopt a few preventive strategies and organisational protection. Universities must also strive to build a culture of inclusion in which faculty, staff, and students are allowed to give different opinions without facing any form of punishment, which will strengthen the principles of academic freedom (Thorp, 2021). To ensure institutional neutrality, it is possible to establish clear policies which ensure that the academic inquiry will not be subject to the political interference (Trinidad, 2024). Introducing systems to protect academic liberties and other forms of knowledge can help the institution to avoid external political influences (Gready *et al.*, 2023).

The Bangladesh Armed Forces are also engaged in operating the institutions of higher education and providing leadership that facilitates discipline, innovativeness, and national orientation with regard to human-resource development objectives. Their roles in higher education governance include management of both public and private universities with the major role being to improve access and quality of education in various sectors such as technology, medicine, and business (Uddin & Kabir, 2024). BUP is a flagship higher education institution administered by the Bangladesh AF. It plays a vital role in developing skilled human resources by fostering knowledge, encouraging innovation through research, and providing an environment that enables its students to understand the realities better (Alam, 2024). However, seemingly BUP is facing some crucial challenges in its academic, research and administrative operations to ponder on its motto.

Existing literature lacks discussion on the involvement of AF in higher education governance in Bangladesh. Some literature explored different issues like strong administrative capacities of army personnel (Moore, 2024), examples of army involvement in university administration, governance of affiliated institutions (Woelert, 2023) importance of discipline and dress code in universities (Wei, 2022; Yunita, 2023), aspects of student politics (Brooks, 2016). However, most of them are from different countries and regional perspectives. Moreover, Uddin and Kabir (2024) explored the role played by the armed force in higher education governance with specific focus on its human-resource development and Alam *et al.* (2025) investigated the contributions, opportunities,

and limitations of Army-administered Educational Institutions in Bangladesh however, their main focus was primarily on secondary and higher secondary education not tertiary education. Although prior researches have also focused on the role of the armed forces in governing higher education in Bangladesh, most of their studies have focused on human-resource development at the cost of the institutional problems. As a result, there is very little academic interest in how the governance structure of the BUP influences its academic excellence, development of the faculty, research including affiliated institutions and their sustainability. The current research, therefore, is aimed at filling this gap by exploring the institutional challenges of BUP and defining strategic directions on the way to long-term academic excellence.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research method to examine the institutional challenges and strategic pathways of BUP. It allows understanding the perceptions, experiences, and thoughts of the people who were close to the governance, academic practice, and administrative work in BUP. Moreover, opinion of some other academicians and professionals was incorporated.

Research Approach and Design

An exploratory and interpretive design was adopted, suitable for examining complex institutional processes where context and interaction play vital roles. The methodology offers flexibility in the process of data collection and analysis, which is needed when having both civil and military participants. Such a design is particularly appropriate for institutional studies where organizational culture, governance dynamics, and stakeholder interaction require in-depth contextual understanding rather than quantitative measurement.

Sampling and Participants

Convenience and purposive sampling techniques were adopted in the study to collect primary data. The sample were the people who actively participated in the academic and administrative activities of BUP including senior faculty members, military and civil officers, and the current and former top officials such as Vice-Chancellors, Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Deans, chairmen of the departments and other key appointment holders. Participants were selected based on their institutional experience, depth of knowledge, and ability to provide informed insights into governance, decision-making, and academic practices. Opinions of some other distinguished academicians also sought to verify and compare the perspectives.

The sample size of 25 key informants (KIIs) and two focus groups (FGDs) was determined based on the principle of information richness and relevance to the research objectives, rather than statistical representation. Participants were selected using predefined criteria, including a minimum of one year of institutional

involvement, direct engagement in academic or administrative decision-making, and demonstrated familiarity with governance and policy processes within BUP or its affiliated institutions. This purposive selection ensured that participants possessed sufficient experiential knowledge to provide credible and contextually grounded insights.

Sources and Methods of Data Collection

This study utilizes both primary and secondary data. For collecting primary data, it conducted some selected Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The semi-structured interviews attempted to focus on the detailed personal experiences and introspective enlightenment of the key informants. 25 key informants, including senior academicians, administrative officers and policy makers and other stakeholders from army, navy and air force associated with BUP and some of its university affiliates were interviewed. The interviews lasted 45-90 minutes each and followed an interview guide that allowed latitude to explore more on the emerging themes. Moreover, two FGDs were conducted with groups of faculty members and senior officials to gather their views and alternative perspective in the context of research problem. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved, defined as the point at which no substantially new themes or insights emerged from subsequent interviews or discussions. Saturation was monitored through ongoing review of interview transcripts and field notes, ensuring adequate coverage of diverse institutional perspectives across civil and military participants.

Some secondary data were also collected to complement and contextualize the primary findings. The sources included: policy documents, annual reports, and academic strategic plans of BUP, scholarly publications, journal articles, relevant theses on higher education governance in Bangladesh; news reports, website materials, and institutional archives. Moreover, policy documents, reports, rules and regulations related to working procedure of similar international universities were also conducted.

Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed thematically following a widely recognized qualitative technique that allows systematic identification and interpretation of patterns within textual data. Following the procedures outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006), the analysis progressed through familiarization, coding, theme development, review and refinement, and finally interpretation. To strengthen coding reliability, an iterative coding process was employed in which preliminary codes were reviewed and refined through repeated examination of the data. A subset of transcripts was independently re-coded after an interval to ensure consistency in theme identification and interpretation. Furthermore, analytical rigor was supported through systematic documentation of coding decisions, maintenance of an audit trail, and continuous

comparison of emerging themes across data sources.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including voluntary participation and the option to withdraw at any time. Written informed consent was secured prior to each interview or discussion. All identifying details were removed during transcription to ensure confidentiality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Leadership Structure and Governance

All over the world Chairmen of the departments and Deans of the faculties are selected from the faculty members in most universities to provide academic, research and administrative leadership for a specific duration mainly on a rotational basis. They are academically very rich, including teaching-learning as well as in research and they have earned credibility by acquiring higher academic degrees. The selection of Chairman and Dean is also largely dependent on their research publications. Long-term involvement with academic affairs helps them to develop academic knowledge and wisdom. At BUP, the above-mentioned leaderships are mainly provided by personnel from the AF without having any experience of serving as a faculty member in the university. However, they possess excellent leadership qualities embedded with discipline, sincerity, adherence with rules and regulations, human resource management, etc.

The analysis of interviews reveals that BUP operates through a distinctive leadership model where Deans and some departments' Chairmen are primarily appointed from the Armed Forces. This approach, while divergent from conventional universities where leadership emerges from senior faculty, has contributed significantly to BUP's academic, research and administrative discipline as a part of efficiency and institutional order. As one respondent aptly remarked, *"The success of BUP came through this unique leadership and administration run by Bangladesh Army."* (KII-6 and 14)

The respondents acknowledged that military officers have "proven leadership qualities, sincerity and rule-abidingness" that have helped BUP to become a "session jam-free and well-governed institution." Still, study participants repeatedly reported that such leadership is often administratively effective, but lacks "academic depth" and "continuity of research culture." The lack of long-term faculty involvement in governance has been cited as a limitation to the growth of academic innovation and intellectual development. One of the senior respondents noted, *"An academic develops a flair for directing education through years of teaching and research; it is next to impossible to replace such traits with administrative features."* (KII-15)

A number of respondents warned that decisions made without an academic perspective can demotivate senior faculties (KII-17) and risk undermining collegiality. The study found a wide agreement for a hybrid or transitional

model of leadership. A number of interviewees argued that a phased approach should be followed in which “competent military officers with MPhil and PhD degrees” would remain in leading for the next few years, some of the positions should be replaced gradually by civilian scholars in top leadership roles. One respondent argued that *“After 2030, the ratio of civil versus military leaders may be adjusted from faculty members, chairmen and Deans to ensure international recognition and ranking”* (KII-06).

Other respondents stressed the value of “academic orientation and leadership training” of military appointees and demanded greater faculty involvement by means of advisory boards and academic councils. Altogether, the results represent a leadership model that ensures administrative excellence and maintains an academic vision. This hybrid system of governance that improves military discipline and academic rigour is one of the strategic paths to institutional maturity and international legitimacy of BUP. However, some of the respondents argue that BUP must maintain its administrative structure, which is military officers because they have brilliant experience of administration. In this regard

therefore, the authority should post military personnel to BUP who have a strong academic background besides military experience. These officers might be more useful to BUP in their professional expertise in leadership and knowledge. If serving military officers have excelled in BUP both academically and administratively, they should be given a chance to serve after retirement hence maintaining continuity of the institution. This would help in maintaining institutional memory, which is one of the pre-requisites of developing academic excellence.

The administration of BUP is highly affected by the frequent posting of the Armed Forces personnel to important administrative as well as academic posts. The data collected over the past decade (Table 1) on the tenure of officers shows that officers serve for very short terms, thus creating serious problems of continuity of leadership and institutional memory. As one respondent commented *“Frequent transfer of the officers leads to the frequent change of different policies”* (KII-11). These short-term cycles inhibit long-term planning, cripple policy implementation, and undermine institutional continuity.

Another observation which was highlighted by several

Table 1: Service Duration of Armed Forces’ Officers at BUP

Rank	Average Duration	Years
Vice Chancellor/ Major General	1 year 2 months	2008-2025
Brigadier General and equivalent	1 year 4 months	
Colonel and equivalent	1 year 11 months	
Lieutenant Colone and equivalent	1 year 11 months	
Major and equivalent	2 years 2 months	

Source: BUP, 2025

informants concerns the appointment of an officer who is near retirement or posted on compassionate ground arguing that such practise can influence how the BUP (KII-7) is developed and leaves a vacuum that hinders the flow of improvement (KII-18). In immediate terms, such a scenario is a clear contrast to the long-term interest of the faculty in academic involvement (KII -15).

In order to improve the stability, the participants suggested that the posting in BUP should be dependent on the minimum of tenure at least three years and that their posting should depend on their experiences, academic and research qualification and motivation. As one of the FGD participants pointed out, *“BUP can never be regarded as a welfare posting centre but professional officers with bright promises ought to be posted to BUP”* (FGD -1).

Affiliated Institutions and Regulatory Challenges

There are as many as 56 affiliated institutions of BUP, with an additional six institutions currently in the process of being affiliated. According to BUP Act-2009, all these institutions are to be regulated by BUP to ensure the maintenance of quality and consistency in higher education. Internationally, there are universities

functioning with similar modalities and have achieved huge recognition. A notable example is the University of Oxford in the UK, which was established in 1096. Presently University of Oxford regulates 43 affiliated colleges, Halls and societies. The university exercises full authority to regulate those affiliated institutions and ensure academic standards. The command, control and communication arrangements are well designed between university and affiliated institutions, both enjoy freedom of exercising their academic and administrative activities within the accepted parameters. In case of BUP as regulatory body, command, control, communication system supposed to be almost similar to the University of Oxford but that is not in vogue since its inception.

The governance relationship between BUP and its affiliated institutions remains a major institutional challenge, primarily due to factual difficulties and administrative complexities. Many affiliates were established long before BUP and continued to operate under separate command structures, thereby developed different cultures with accountability system and limited academic oversight. As one respondent observed, *“The affiliated institutions are regulated by their parent headquarters... limiting BUP’s*

authority as per BUP Act-2009” (KII-14). This overlapping jurisdiction often leads to inconsistencies in curricula, evaluation, and quality assurance across institutions.

Resistance to change further compounds the problem. A participant noted that *“each affiliated institution is not willing to follow the rules and regulations of BUP,”* reflecting the persistence of practiced institutional norms (KII-14). Others pointed out that BUP’s regulatory capacity is constrained by inadequate manpower and hierarchy-related sensitivities- *“few affiliated institutions are headed by senior or equivalent rank officers, which creates status quo and coordination challenges”* (KII-16). At times, Armed Forces’ institutions refer to their respective headquarters and remain reluctant to adhere to BUP’s instructions.

Research and Knowledge Production

BUP despite having high standard affiliated institutions (such as NDC, DSCSC, MIST, seven medical colleges, three nursing colleges, Bangladesh Military Academy, Bangladesh Naval Academy, Bangladesh Airforce Academy and so on) is yet to achieve significant recognition in the field of research and scholarly publication. Main reason is affiliated institutions’ research and publications are not accumulated in a single banner, which is neither benefiting the concerned institution nor the university. If all research output (BUP and its affiliated institutions) is calculated including faculty members’ credibility in a single profile by this time BUP would be in a good position in regards of world ranking. The principal challenge lies in the fragmented nature of research outputs, which remain dispersed across affiliated institutions without being reflected under a unified BUP banner. As one participant observed, *“BUP’s research profile does not yet reflect its true academic capacity mainly because the outputs of its affiliated institutions are scattered”* (KII-3). Moreover, an FGD participant emphasized that *“if all research publications from institutions like NDC, DSCSC, MIST, and medical colleges were consolidated under the BUP banner, the university’s global ranking and reputation would significantly improve”* (FGD-2).

Others pointed to administrative and policy limitations, arguing that *“BUP needs to develop and implement a regulation requiring all affiliated faculty to use BUP’s name during publication, in the way affiliated institutions of the Oxford University do”* (KII-10). Several key informants suggested the establishment of a Central Research Repository and a Research and Publication Council to coordinate such standardization, data integration and publishing under the name of BUP (KII-3, 12, 14, 20, 22).

Civil-Military Integration and Inclusivity

Superiority-inferiority complexes are widespread in the workplace, creating dysfunctional organizational climates, though not expected. This phenomenon is somehow noticeable in the BUP due to the distinct composition of its workforce; most of the administrative staff are from military backgrounds and majority of the faculty members have non-military academic backgrounds. Certain situations do not demonstrate mutual respect

and professional courtesy as inequalities in protocol, qualifications and availability of facilities vis-à-vis workload serve to divide and create an uncomfortable working environment. Nevertheless, BUP is a unique university in which military discipline is simultaneously manifested and civilian academic freedom is affirmed, which produces both benefits and challenges. While most respondents felt the dual structure promotes discipline and efficiency in operation, in some instances, it promotes perceptions of superiority and inferiority among staff. One respondent says, *“I’ve found most of the defence officers very decent and understanding. However, there are some officers who consider BUP as just another unit and try to practice commanding with the faculty members”* (KII 15), while another commented, *“Faculty members are not adequately respected by both mid-level AF and civilian officers”* (KII 17). However, this phenomenon is commonly observed in most of the universities between faculty members and non-faculty or administrative personnel.

Some of the respondents highlighted that this imbalance was not a result of ill will but due to differences in background, training and professional culture. Consequently, *“authority should make endeavour to officers and faculty members to behave maturely and show due respect to each other,”* and *“senior professors should be asked to sensitize newly recruited teachers”* to create a congenial atmosphere in the workplace (KII-1). Other important interventions were proposed for inclusiveness and collaboration: joint induction and training programmes for all new employees (KII-14); mixed committees to help shared decision-making (KII-7); and a formal Code of Conduct to ensure collegiality and mutual respect (KII-5). In addition, participants identified dialogue, socialisation and interpersonal interaction as important, where they suggested *“a social meeting or interaction forum would be good”* (KII-10) that could cross over professional boundaries and humanise human relationships.

Student Life, Politics, and Discipline

Environment at BUP is very much apolitical and disciplined in nature. These features distinguish BUP from most of the universities in Bangladesh. The present study has shown a high level of agreement between several features and success and reputation of the university. Regarding student politics, majority of the respondents found student politics to be disruptive and unnecessary in BUP, since the governance is military-backed and there are existing participatory but nonpartisan forums. One participant stated that *“BUP should continue to maintain its apolitical position as one of its most unique and valuable attributes”* (KII-3). Another interviewee also suggested that *“Politics cannot be tolerated at BUP premises; it will destroy the confidence of parents who want to send their children to BUP for education”* (KII-16). Respondents believed the advent of student politics could undermine the academic atmosphere, discipline and unity at BUP. As a result, the majority respondents advocated for a model of “guided participation” mediated by clubs, academic councils, and

co-curricular forums, which provide leadership without partisan associations. One of the key informants asserted that *“To protect this culture, BUP has to develop and enhance its existing student representation processes through apolitical structures such as student clubs, societies, and academic forums”* (KII-9). The emphasis was on nurturing civic responsibility through constructive engagement rather than partisanship. Participants also emphasized preventive measures such as strict codes of conduct, signed undertakings when admitted and careful monitoring as positive measures to limit political penetration (KII-3, 5, 7, 14).

A few numbers of respondents proposed the formation of a structured non-partisan “Student Welfare Council” or advisory forums to facilitate participatory dialogue while keeping the electoral model out of politics. One participant suggested that *“An apolitical BUP Students’ Union consisting of elected students with close supervision may be allowed to take care of students’ welfare”* (KII-6). This proposal lies somewhere in between representation and institutional control. However, most emphasized that the existing class-representative (CR) systems and faculty-student consultations are sufficient channels for free expression and feedback. It is commonly accepted that political neutrality is an essential component of BUP’s institutional integrity, while civic and leadership development is attained through discipline, not political activism.

Discipline was also the pillar that all key informant interviews confirmed as the foundational aspect of BUP’s identity and professional credibility. One of the FGD participants observed that *“discipline is a core of BUP’s identity, and one of the main reasons for its growing reputation in Bangladesh and internationally”* (FGD-01). The institutional culture of punctuality, modestities, neatness, zero tolerance on drug abuse, ragging and academic dishonesty has exceptionally helped the BUP graduates to make themselves disciplined professionals in the national and international arenas. While some participants argued for discipline should remain non-negotiable: *“Discipline leads to success, so those who want higher education will obviously accept discipline”* (KII-2), others argued for moderate flexibility, *“a decent dress code with reasonable flexibility would be better”* (KII-9) and limited relaxations in attendance and timetable rules to reduce student stress. Realizing the importance of Dress codes, numerous universities of the word introduced or directed for different types of dress codes (Yunita *et al.*, 2023; Syafruddin, 2025; Ndlovu *et al.*, 2023)

Although there were a few who talked about greater freedom, the majority opinion was that too much freedom can dilute the ways of life that make BUP who they are. One interviewer warned that *“Freedom and discipline are inversely proportionate... our students might falter in enjoying the freedom and get derailed or misuse it”* (KII-6). Teachers and administrators were compared to guardians repeatedly, with the metaphor of the BUP as a “greater family” drawing up teachers as mentors who lead but do not dominate learners. This was said to make the individual

more professional, respectful and morally strong so that freedom would not be absolute but “guided.”

In essence, the findings underscore that discipline and apolitical culture are mutually reinforcing pillars of BUP’s academic excellence. The university’s orderly environment, coupled with meaningful but non-partisan student participation, fosters a rare balance of autonomy and accountability uncommon in the wider higher education landscape of Bangladesh.

Coordination with Armed Forces Headquarters

Findings indicate that coordination between BUP and the three services headquarters (the Army, Navy and Air Force) remains a major administrative challenge. The need to communicate separately with the individual services oftentimes leads to redundant communication, slow postings, and a lack of strategic alignment of officer duties. As one informant noted, *“BUP has administrative challenges in coordination with three different services headquarters. The process would certainly be made easier by having a single point of contact”* (KII-03). Several participants (Both in KII & FGD) were in favour of aligning postings for their respective services, Army to BUP, Navy to Bangladesh Maritime University (BMU), and Air Force to Aviation and Aerospace University, Bangladesh (AAUB), on the basis that *“it would be easier to coordinate, better aligned, and simpler to command and control”* (KII-13, 17, 19, 20, 22).

Nevertheless, some felt that such separation could weaken BUP’s tri-service character and interdisciplinary ethos. As one participant said, *“allowing postings to be restricted to one service may decrease the diversity and diminish the collegiality of the University”* (KII-15). However, some other participants ruled out this concept, mentioning that present system is creating further miscoordination and delay in posting appropriate officers in an appropriate position. Posting officers from a single service to respective universities would keep the inclusive structure of BUP, BMU and AUUB and would minimize administrative delays. In addition, a number of interviewees highlighted the importance of clear posting criteria, competency mapping and longer tenures to maintain institutional memory and stability.

Strategic and Future Challenges

BUP has recently developed an Academic Strategic Plan (ASP), which needs to be reviewed periodically to meet time’s demand, aspects of BUP’s affiliated institutions need to be included in the revised ASP. Some Key informants portraits a picture of a university at an inflection point: BUP’s military setting has secured a disciplined, low-risk campus but that same distinctiveness now poses strategic constraints as the institution scales. Majority of the respondents repeatedly identified four interlinked challenges: (a) preserving the military–civilian balance without stifling academic freedom; (b) recruiting, retaining and developing qualified faculty; (c) expanding infrastructure and services to match rapid enrolment growth; and (d) consolidating academic curricula, research

and international visibility. As one informant warned, losing the chaptered status of newly acquired land would leave BUP *“vulnerable to external influence and potential unrest”* that could undermine the learning environment. (KII 12). Faculty supply and quality emerged as a pressing bottleneck. Several interviewees noted a pattern of young lecturers treating BUP as a springboard, then leaving for higher study or overseas placement, while a shortage of senior research leaders weakens institutional research capacity. *“Research facilities (CHSR–BRC) should be headed by revered researchers/professors, not by senior officials with no research/publication experience,”* a senior respondent argued (KII 15). Linked to this is governance and placement of staff: misplaced appointments and top-heavy administration risk sidelining academic decision-making and eroding faculty morale, *“policies are being made by people who are not going to be impacted by it in the long run.”* (KII 14).

Recommendations

From empirical evidence and participants’ recommendations, this section outlines a structured set of policy directions and institutional strategies for BUP. The recommendations are organized into three progressive stages: addressing immediate governance and administrative issues, implementing medium-term reforms for institutional consolidation, and pursuing long-term strategic priorities to enhance academic credibility, research productivity, and international standing.

Leadership, Governance and Posting Policy

The present ratio of major decision-making positions should be maintained which is tilted to military. In this regard, academic credentials and continuity should be prioritised when placing AF officers in BUP’s key posts. Especially, appointments of Vice-Chancellor, Deans and Chairmans should be from Army with higher research degrees (MPhil/PhD) and documented academic experience. AF may select some academically sound officers and prepare them specially for BUP and other educational institutions who will serve there for a longer duration.

Tenure of Officers in BUP

Military officers posted to BUP should be kept for minimum three years for the purpose of keeping institutional memory. The declared duration is equally important for an individual’s mindset and to concentrate on contribution by avoiding the dilemma of uncertainty of posting out. Retention of academically outstanding officers at BUP should be allowed beyond routine promotion/posting where uninterrupted leadership benefits academic programmes. Moreover, Army Headquarters may consider some academically experienced officers for appointing in BUP permanently and even after their retirement from service to leverage their joint academic and professional expertise to foster BUP’s excellence in teaching and learning. Some positions may be marked as ‘serving/retired’ officers from

Bangladesh Army.

Affiliates, Quality Assurance and Accreditation

A Pro-Vice Chancellor (Affiliated Institutions) should be appointed in place of Inspector of Colleges (IoC), under whose leadership a central Quality Assurance and Accreditation Cell should be established. The office should harmonise curricula, assessment, and faculty standards across affiliated institutions; convene regular joint academic boards to ensure compliance. The office will co-ordinate and collaborate with the affiliated institutions, dividing them into different clusters such as medical, security and strategic studies, engineering, training institutes, etc. There should be enough scope for academic and research collaboration between the faculty members of BUP and its affiliated institutions. These institutions should also adhere to BUP rules and regulations to ensure effective quality control, which will ultimately benefit them, and overall standard of military administered educational institutions.

Research Consolidation and Knowledge Visibility

It is essential to establish a Central Research & Publication Portal or repository that aggregates outputs from BUP and all affiliates, with mandatory affiliation guidelines so that institutional credit accrues centrally. Publication incentives, intramural grants, and a streamlined process may be offered for joint faculty–student research to raise both quantity and quality of outputs. Moreover, researchers from affiliated institutions should incorporate BUP in their research and publication because enhancements in BUP’s institutional ranking will, in turn, contribute to the academic reputation and advancement of all the affiliated institutions.

Student Development, Welfare and Apolitical Identity

University’s apolitical character should be preserved while expanding non-partisan leadership opportunities by strengthening clubs, mentorship, career services, counselling and leadership training to nurture civic skills without partisan politics. Student welfare should be enhanced through ensuring facilities such as dormitories, sports, counselling, medical facilities etc., streamline internship and employer linkages so graduates gain employ-ability skills. Adequate measures should be adopted so that the university can insulate outside vested corners interferences in its smooth functioning.

Co-ordination of Posting with Services Headquarters

Co-ordination with respective services headquarters regarding posting of officers in BUP is difficult - as presently officers from three services (Army, Navy and Air Force) are posted to BUP. Bangladesh AF are having more two public universities (MBU and AAUB) like BUP those are mainly administered by Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Air Force respectively. Therefore, to ease up the coordination and related issues posting of officers

from AF may be synchronised with the universities i.e. Army officers to BUP, Navy officers to BMU and Air Force officers to AAUB.

Emphasizing Discipline and Dress Code

BUP should preserve its disciplined culture as the foundation of its distinct identity. This will help in maintaining credibility and fostering a holistic academic environment. The environment encourages intellectual, cultural, and extracurricular freedom while keeping non-negotiable rules on integrity, modesty, and safety. In addition, a descent dress code with acceptable flexibility would be better. Dress code relaxation could weaken the culture of modesty, professionalism, and unity. It is mentionable that, many world-class universities like Texas A&M University, Bob Jones University and Brigham Young University (USA), Les Roches Global Hospitality University (Switzerland), Islamic University of Madinah, University of Tehran (Iran) and many other universities impose different types of dress codes.

Civil–Military Cohesion and Institutional Culture

It is important to institutionalise regular joint orientations, civil–military sensitivity workshops, and mixed governance committees to foster mutual respect and dismantle superiority–inferiority practices. Code of Conduct should be enforced that recognises both military discipline and academic freedom. Periodic civil–military orientation programmes and social forums could be arranged to humanise relations and promote collegiality. At times qualified well-oriented civil officers may be posted as additional registrar/Dean to diversify leadership experiences, enhance administrative efficiency, and reinforce a culture of shared responsibility between military and civilian stakeholders. Academically qualified officers should also work exclusively as teaching faculty with other faculty members. During faculty development and orientation programme, the importance of civil–military relations and BUP’s culture should be communicated distinctively for the purpose of tranquility.

Land Status of BUP

BUP should maintain the newly acquired lands that are co-located to present campus as chaptered land under cantonment authority which is crucial for safeguarding BUP’s apolitical environment. Being located inside the cantonment has already proven effective in insulating BUP from external disruptive influences that often derail academic environments in other universities. Extending this protective framework to newly acquired lands will ensure that campus’s education remains undisturbed by vested corners or political unrest. In the long run, this approach will reinforce BUP’s reputation as a secure, focused, and disciplined center of higher learning.

Miscellaneous

The Academic Strategic Plan of BUP needs to be reviewed at regular intervals to reflect on the changes which are

considered essential to its smooth growth. All research Centres must have sufficient researchers and must include provisions for securing research funds. These research centres are supposed to be fortified; they are to be strictly supervised and turned into centres of innovative and inventive knowledge. Members of the faculty ought not to be burdened with non-academic responsibilities. There should also be a provision of short-term visiting scholars’ appointments (including international) and provision for seed funding to spur publication in indexed journals. Smart campus infrastructure, digital learning, and rejuvenated Global Affairs Cell should be invested in boosting international collaborations and exchange programmes. Consistent with the Academic Strategic Plan, the plan of internationalisation of the campus in terms of foreign students and faculty members’ enrollment is a necessity. Moreover, centralization of alumni databases is also important to make use of networks in research, internship and fundraising.

Collectively, these steps will preserve BUP’s core strengths, discipline, order and national service, while creating the institutional flexibility and scholarly depth required to grow into a research-led, globally engaged university.

CONCLUSION

This paper analysed Bangladesh University of Professionals in terms of institutional dynamics and governance, leadership, academic culture, and strategic positioning, more specifically the unique civil–military structure of the university. The research results show that the military-leading administration of BUP has played a key role in maintaining discipline, efficiency in the operations, and apolitical scholarly setting, which in combination, strengthens the institutional stability and trust of the public. At the same time, the high frequency of posting, low academic engagement in leadership, and disjointed research outputs, as well as the difficulties with coordination with related institutions, hinder the university on the way to becoming a long-term academic excellence and worldwide reputation. This analysis indicates that the future of BUP will not be based on the substitution of its present model but will be based on perfection of that model by longer term of leadership, increased academic participation in decision-making, integration of research outputs, and enhanced regulatory harmony between affiliated institutions. Enhancing civil–military coordination, protecting academic freedom in a disciplined concept, and investing in faculty and research infrastructure become important priorities. Although the study is context-based, its findings can be added to the crucial discussion on governance of higher education in institutions that are specially run by the military. Research in the future can elaborate on this question by using comparative or quantitative research methods to determine the academic outcomes in the long term. All in all, the harmonisation of institutional discipline and scholarly continuity would continue to play a key role in ensuring that BUP attains long-term academic excellence.

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