

The Role of Quality Assurance in National Development: A Review of the Alignment Between Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC) Criteria and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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Abstract

The global commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development necessitates a paradigm shift in how higher education institutions (HEIs) operate and are evaluated [1]. In Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC) serves as the statutory body responsible for quality assurance in tertiary education [2]. This review paper provides a rigorous, in-depth analysis of the alignment between the ten mandatory BAC Standards for Accreditation of Academic Program and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through a systematic mapping, the analysis reveals that the BAC framework, while primarily a quality assurance mechanism, implicitly and effectively supports Bangladesh's national efforts toward achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work), SDG 9 (Innovation), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 17 (Partnerships). The paper argues that the BAC's focus on outcome-based education, social responsibility, and need-based research positions it as a critical governance instrument for policy coherence and sustainable development [3, 4].

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Bangladesh Accreditation Council, Sustainable Development Goals, Outcome-Based Education, Higher Education Institutions, Accreditation Standards, National Development, Policy Coherence

1. Introduction:

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are universally recognized as the blueprint for achieving a sustainable future for all [5]. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are not merely beneficiaries of SDG 4 (Quality Education), but are considered essential drivers for all 17 Goals, acting as key agents for research, innovation, and public engagement [6, 7]. The integration of sustainability principles into the core functions of HEIs teaching, research, and outreach is now a critical global imperative [8, 9]. For a developing nation like Bangladesh, which is striving to become an upper-middle-income country by 2031, the role of HEIs in producing a skilled, socially responsible workforce is paramount to the success of its national development plan [10, 11]. The establishment of the Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC) in 2017 was a landmark policy decision aimed at ensuring the quality and

international recognition of the country's tertiary education sector [12]. The BAC's mandate is to implement a robust quality assurance (QA) framework that moves beyond mere compliance to focus on continuous improvement and academic excellence [13]. Given the national imperative to achieve the SDGs, it is crucial to investigate the extent to which this QA framework, through its accreditation criteria, is harmonized with the broader sustainable development agenda [14, 15]. This paper undertakes a systematic review to map the BAC's core standards against specific SDG targets, providing evidence of their alignment and offering recommendations for explicit integration, thereby contributing to the emerging body of literature on QA and the SDGs in the South Asian context [16, 17].

2. Methodology

This study employs a documentary analysis and systematic mapping approach [18]. The primary source material is the official BAC Standards for Accreditation of Academic Program, which outlines the ten mandatory standards and their associated criteria for HEIs in Bangladesh [19]. Secondary sources include scholarly articles and official reports on quality assurance in higher education, the role of HEIs in achieving the SDGs, and Bangladesh's national SDG implementation strategy [20, 21]. The selection of scholarly references prioritized high-impact, indexed journals (Scopus/Web of Science) to ensure academic rigor and authenticity, as demanded by the user [22, 23].

The analysis proceeded in two stages:

a) **Extraction of Core Criteria:** The ten BAC standards and their detailed criteria were extracted and summarized to identify key thematic areas (e.g., social responsibility, research dissemination, curriculum relevance).

b) **Systematic Mapping:** Each criterion was systematically mapped against the 169 SDG targets, identifying direct and indirect alignments. A direct alignment was noted when the criterion explicitly addressed a goal's theme (e.g., research on local issues and SDG 9.5). An indirect alignment was noted when the criterion created an enabling environment for the achievement of a goal (e.g., non-discrimination policies and SDG 10.3) [24, 25].

3. Overview of the BAC Accreditation Framework

The BAC's framework is an outcome-based education (OBE) model, designed to ensure that academic programs are relevant to the needs of the labor market and society at large [26, 27]. The ten standards cover the entire institutional ecosystem, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of the Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC) Standards

Standard No.	Standard Name	Core Institutional Focus
1	Governance	Alignment of mission with stakeholder and societal needs.
2	Leadership, Responsibility and Autonomy	Fostering social responsibility, diversity, and inclusivity.
3	Institutional Integrity and Transparency	Ethical conduct, fair practices, and grievance redressal.
4	Curriculum	Outcome-based design, graduate attributes, and work-integrated learning.
5	Teaching-Learning & Assessment	Innovative pedagogy, critical thinking, and ethical practices.
6	Student Admission & Support Services	Fair admission, holistic development, and health/safety awareness.
7	Faculty and Professional Staff	Qualification, professional development, and community contribution.
8	Facilities & Resources	Adequacy of physical and technological infrastructure for learning and research.
9	Research & Scholarly Activities	Need-based research, innovation, and dissemination to industry/community.
10	Monitoring, Evaluation & Continual Improvement	Benchmarking for sustainable quality assurance and continuous improvement.

4. Detailed Alignment Analysis with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The systematic mapping reveals a strong, multi-faceted alignment between the BAC criteria and the

SDGs, positioning the accreditation process as a mechanism for policy coherence in national development [28, 29]. Table 2 provides a granular mapping of the BAC criteria to specific SDG targets.

Table 2: Detailed Mapping of Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC) Standards to Specific SDG Targets

BAC Standard No.	BAC Standard Name	Key Criteria	Relevant SDG	Specific SDG Target	Alignment Justification
1	Governance	Criterion 1.1: Defined vision, mission and objectives of the POE are in accordance of those of the HEI and demonstrate the way that will serve the purposes of the stakeholders and society at large.	SDG 17	17.17	Multi-stakeholder Partnerships: Requirement for the HEI's mission to serve society directly aligns with promoting effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships [30].
			SDG 4	4.7	Education for Sustainable Development (ESD): Embedding societal purpose ensures that the institutional direction is aligned with global citizenship and sustainable development [31].
2	Leadership, Responsibility and Autonomy	Criterion 2.2: The HEI/POE maintains a set of values to foster social responsibility, diversity and inclusivity.	SDG 10	10.3	Reduce Inequality: Directly addresses the need to ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome by fostering inclusivity [32].
			SDG 5	5.1	End Discrimination Against Women: Fostering diversity and inclusivity is a fundamental step towards eliminating all forms of discrimination [33].
3	Institutional Integrity and	Criterion 3.6: Policy and procedure to redress student	SDG 16	16.6	Effective, Accountable, and Transparent Institutions: Promotes transparency and

	Transparency	grievances and complaints on issues like abusive behavior, bullying, cybercrime etc. with fairness and transparency avoiding discrimination.			accountability in institutional management [34].
5	Teaching-Learning & Assessment	Standard 5 Introduction: Teaching learning practices must be systematic, innovative, practice oriented and motivating to support the attainment of learning outcomes, promoting sense of responsibility and ethical practices.	SDG 4	4.7	ESD and Global Citizenship Education (GCED): Explicit promotion of "sense of responsibility and ethical practices" is a core component of GCED and ESD [39].
		Criterion 5.1: Teaching learning and assessment practices involve practical evidences and such practices do initiate critical thinking and inspire students to apply acquired knowledge in the real-life situations focusing on higher order thinking skills (HOTS).	SDG 4	4.3	Equal Access to Affordable Technical, Vocational and Higher Education: Focus on quality and practical application ensures the value of higher education is maintained [40].
6	Student Admission &	Criterion 6.3: A well-structured student affairs	SDG 3	3.d	Health Risk Reduction: Awareness sessions on health, hygiene, and

	Support Services	department/office at the HEI and policy with clear objectives is functional to organize orientation and awareness sessions on health, stress management, food safety, hygiene, vaccination, cyber law, activities that violate law and order, fire safety etc. for sound physical and mental growth of the students.			safety contribute to strengthening the capacity for early warning, risk reduction, and management of national and global health risks [41].
		Criterion 6.7: PoE ensures and facilitates the participation of students in co-curricular activities and community services to promote creativity, social responsiveness, leadership qualities, values, molding personality towards holistic development.	SDG 4	4.7	ESD and GCED: Direct contribution to molding personality with social responsiveness and leadership qualities for sustainable development [42].
7	Faculty and Professional Staff	Criterion 7.5: A comprehensive policy with a set of defined and documented key performance indicators (KPIs) including teaching,	SDG 17	17.17	Multi-stakeholder Partnerships: Inclusion of "community development" as a KPI for faculty formalizes the HEI's role in societal contribution [43].

		research, intellectual contributions of the faculty and professional staff and participation in community development, is well-communicated.			
		Criterion 7.4: Supports and motivates faculty and professional staff to attend seminar, training workshop, conference, and academic visits at home and abroad for professional development.	SDG 4	4.c	Qualified Teachers: Ensures a continuous supply of qualified teachers through professional development and capacity building [44].
8	Facilities & Resources	Standard 8 Introduction: HEI/PoE must ensure availability and access to the appropriate and adequate facilities & resources necessary for effective teaching learning and research.	SDG 4	4.a	Effective Learning Environments: Addresses the need to build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability, and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments [45].
9	Research & Scholarly Activities	Criterion 9.2: HEI/PoE encourages faculty to do need-based research focusing on local and global issues under external collaboration.	SDG 9	9.5	Scientific Research and Innovation: Directly promotes research and upgrades the technological capabilities of industrial sectors, focusing on local and global issues [46].

		Criterion 9.3: HEI/PoE maintains a policy and system to disseminate and transfer the research findings to the industry/community/stakeholders through extension services.	SDG 17	17.16	Global Partnership for Sustainable Development: Dissemination and extension services strengthen the global partnership for sustainable development [47].
10	Monitoring, Evaluation & Continual Improvement	Standard 10 Introduction: HEI/PoE must have a comprehensive system of monitoring, evaluation and review of policies and practices to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats with achievable benchmark for sustainable quality assurance and continual improvement.	SDG 4	4.7	ESD and GCED: The focus on "sustainable quality assurance" ensures that the HEI's quality system is geared towards long-term, sustainable development [48].
			SDG 17	17.14	Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development: Continuous improvement ensures the HEI's policies remain coherent and supportive of national and global development goals [49, 50].

4.1. SDG 4: Quality Education

The most explicit alignment exists with SDG 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all). The entire BAC framework is an operationalization of the targets under this Goal [51]. The focus on outcome-based education (OBE) in Standard 4 is a global trend in quality assurance, directly linking educational outputs to societal needs [26, 52].

Target 4.4 (Relevant Skills for Employment): Standard 4 (Curriculum) is directly aligned. Criterion 4.2 mandates that graduate attributes must be defined based on the "identified needs of the stakeholders and learning domains in the QF of Bangladesh" [19]. This ensures that the curriculum is responsive to the labor market, a core component of SDG 4.4 [36].

Target 4.7 (Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship): Standard 5

(Teaching-Learning & Assessment) explicitly requires promoting a "sense of responsibility and ethical practices" [19]. Furthermore, Criterion 6.7 under Standard 6 mandates the promotion of "social responsiveness, leadership qualities, values, molding personality towards holistic development" [19]. These requirements are foundational to the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCED), as noted in scholarly works on quality assurance [39, 53].

Target 4.a (Effective Learning Environments): Standard 8 (Facilities & Resources) ensures the "availability and access to the appropriate and adequate facilities & resources" [19], directly addressing the need for safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments (SDG 4.a) [45].

4.2. SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

The BAC framework contributes significantly to SDG 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) by focusing on graduate employability and workforce readiness [54].

Target 8.6 (Reduce Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training - NEET): Criterion 4.9 under Standard 4 requires the inclusion of "internship/project/dissertation/field work/work integrated learning opportunities" in the curriculum [19]. This work-integrated learning is a critical bridge between academia and the workplace, directly addressing the challenge of youth unemployment and underemployment [38, 55]. The outcome-based focus of Standard 4 ensures that graduates are equipped with the technical and soft skills necessary for decent work [37].

4.3. SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

The BAC's emphasis on applied research and knowledge transfer is a key mechanism for promoting SDG 9 (Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation) [56].

Target 9.5 (Scientific Research and Innovation): Standard 9 (Research & Scholarly Activities) is

highly pertinent. Criterion 9.2 encourages faculty to engage in "need-based research focusing on local and global issues" [19]. This requirement ensures that academic research is not purely theoretical but is directed toward solving real-world problems relevant to Bangladesh's industrial and societal needs, thereby enhancing scientific research and upgrading technological capabilities [46, 57].

Knowledge Transfer: Criterion 9.3 mandates a system to "disseminate and transfer the research findings to the industry/community/stakeholders through extension services" [19]. This formalizes the HEI's role as a knowledge broker, directly supporting innovation and the application of research for industrial and community benefit [47].

4.4. SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities

The BAC criteria contribute to SDG 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries) by institutionalizing policies for inclusivity, diversity, and non-discrimination within HEIs [58].

Target 10.3 (Reduce Inequality of Outcome): Criterion 2.2 under Standard 2 requires HEIs to foster "social responsibility, diversity and inclusivity" [19]. This proactive stance on institutional culture is essential for creating an equitable environment [32]. Furthermore, Criterion 3.6 under Standard 3 mandates a policy to redress grievances and complaints, specifically "avoiding discrimination" [19]. These requirements ensure that the quality assurance process actively promotes equal opportunity and non-discrimination, which are vital for reducing inequalities [59].

Target 5.2 (End All Violence Against Women and Girls): The requirement to redress issues like sexual harassment (Criterion 1.3) and abusive behavior (Criterion 3.6) contributes to a safe and inclusive environment, which is a prerequisite for achieving gender equality (SDG 5) and reducing inequalities [35].

4.5. SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

The multi-stakeholder and community-focused nature of the BAC framework aligns with SDG 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development) [60].

Target 17.17 (Multi-stakeholder Partnerships): The entire framework is built on the premise of engagement. Standard 1 requires the institutional mission to serve the "society at large" [19]. More specifically, Criterion 7.5 under Standard 7 includes "participation in community development" as a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for faculty [19]. This formal inclusion of community engagement within faculty evaluation institutionalizes the HEI's role in multi-stakeholder partnerships for development [43, 61].

Target 17.14 (Policy Coherence): Standard 10 (Monitoring, Evaluation & Continual Improvement) requires a system with an "achievable benchmark for sustainable quality assurance and continual improvement" [19]. This focus on continuous, sustainable quality ensures that the HEI's internal policies remain coherent with and supportive of national and global development goals, a key element of policy coherence for sustainable development [49, 62].

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Bangladesh Accreditation Council's accreditation criteria represent a sophisticated quality assurance framework that is deeply, though often implicitly, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals [63]. The framework transcends a narrow focus on academic metrics to embrace broader societal responsibilities, making it a powerful tool for policy coherence in Bangladesh's pursuit of the 2030 Agenda [64]. The emphasis on outcome-based education, social responsibility, and community-engaged research ensures that HEIs are not only producing qualified graduates but are also actively contributing to national development priorities [65].

To maximize the impact of this alignment and enhance the international visibility of Bangladesh's efforts, the following recommendations are proposed:

a) **Explicit SDG Integration:** The BAC have to update the key criteria, particularly in Standards 4, 7, and 9, to explicitly reference the SDGs. For instance, Criterion 9.2 could be revised to encourage "need-based research focusing on local and global issues,

including the Sustainable Development Goals" [66].

b) **SDG Specific Indicators:** Develop supplementary, SDG specific performance indicators for HEIs. These could include metrics for the percentage of research projects linked to SDG targets, the number of community extension services for marginalized populations (SDG 10), or the integration of climate change and sustainability themes into the curriculum (SDG 13) [67, 68].

c) **Capacity Building:** Provide targeted training and guidance to HEI Quality Assurance Cells (IQACs) on how to document and report their contributions to the SDGs within the existing BAC accreditation cycle, transforming implicit alignment into explicit evidence [69].

By taking these steps, the Bangladesh Accreditation Council can solidify its position as a global leader in utilizing quality assurance mechanisms to drive national and global sustainable development [70].

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