

Dynamics in Management of Open Schooling: a case of Open School of Bangladesh Open University

Theme: Formal Education
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Md. Shafiul Alam (prof_smalam@yahoo.com) Bangladesh Open University

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Md. Mizanoor Rahman (mizan2006@yahoo.com) Bangladesh Open University

Abstract

The Open School (OS) of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) runs three pre-University programs namely Junior School Certificate (JSC) for Grade 6-8, Secondary School Certificate (SSC) for Grade 9-10, and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) for grade 11-12 through open and distance learning (ODL) mode. Management of these programs is highly influenced by the government policy particularly at the time of political change in Bangladesh. Normally, formal school syllabus and curriculum are subject to change as per the wills of the current government although BOU-OS has the autonomy to design its curriculum. This change affects total management of open school because BOU Open School also maintains the curriculum for its school programs which is at par to the formal curriculum. This discusses the dynamics of open school management at the time of educational policy change in Bangladesh.

1 Introduction

Bangladesh Open University (BOU) runs three pre-University programmes – Junior School Certificate (JSC) for Grade: 6-8, Secondary School Certificate (SSC) for Grade: 9-10 and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) for Grade: 11-12 as part of its core academic portfolio under the Open School. It is reported that BOU is the only University in the world which has the full-fledged Open School under the core academic activities. That's why; BOU Open School enjoys constitutionally equal status to the five other Schools (Faculties) of the University namely School of Education (SOE), School of Business (SOB), School of Agriculture & Rural Development (SARD), School of Science & Technology (SST) and School of Social Sciences, Humanities & Languages (SSHL). All these Schools offer higher programmes along with some need-based certificate and diploma programmes. As of today, Open Schooling has been very popular and successful because it matches with the prime objective of the BOU in providing wide access to the community as a “university of the second chance” and “reach to the unreached”. BOU-OS registers more learners than the rest of the Schools put together in the country. That's why; management of open schooling activities is very crucial and has been gigantic work in relation to other schools. This paper aims at describing the Open school as whole with particular concentration on managerial aspects such as course development, student support services, and the examination systems of the two main programs namely Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) programmes.

2 Managing school programs

2.1 Clientele

BOU started its operation through a project under loan arrangement with Asian Development Bank. Project profile describes-----

“potential clientele will be the middle and lower class rural youths with primary and secondary levels of education, untrained teachers at primary and secondary schools, rural women including housewives, extension agencies in the field of agriculture, rural development, family planning, health and those professional groups who upgrade their skills for professional development. The rural disadvantaged youths who have very limited access to conventional education will be the special beneficiaries of the BOU establishment project. [ADB, 1993].

That's why; Open School regarded itself as providing a model for open access to educational opportunity. It provides provision available to women, the poor, the unemployed, and those in remote rural areas, which the conventional education (with associated catchments areas and its socio-economic barriers to entry) tends to reinforce. Open School's enrollment makes BOU as mega-University, see Table A:

Table A: BOU-OS Learner's Enrolment

Enrollment						Curriculum	Primary Media	Notes
Programs								
JSC		SSC		HSC				
(Grade: 6-8)		(Grade: 9-10)		(Grade:11-12)		Curriculum is designed at par to the national curriculum for each program; but JSC curriculum is coupled with vocational courses.	Print, Radio-TV Broadcast, f2f contact at the tutorial centres twice in month	Three Learning CDs are provided with the ODL centres for vocational courses
Year	Learners	Year	Learners	Year	Learners			
		1995	16,168					
		1996	14,111					
		1997	15,803					
		1998	16,427	1998	12,006			
		1999	25,114	1999	-			
		2000	25,829	2000	25,694			
		2001	32,063	2001	17,154			
		2002	35,734	2002	26,906			
		2003	32,094	2003	34,363			
		2004	46,325	2004	39,168			
		2005	43,747	2005	33,247			
		2006	64,752	2006	43,361			
2007	2,000	2007	110,654	2007	72,529			
2008	-	2008	120,130	2008	42,974			
2009	-	2009	77,251	2009				
Total	2,000		676,202		347,402			

BOU was established in 1992 and this has been the only Open and Distance Learning (ODL) provider in the country; and with the main campus in Gazipur, some 30 km north of the capital, Dhaka. The University enrolls each year about 100,000 learners in its 23 programs of study and 90 per cent of them are the learners of the Open School programs. The University developed countrywide network through 12 Regional Resources Centre (RRCs) and 80 Coordinating Offices (COs). In addition, the Open School has more than 1,000 Tutorial Centres (TCs) through out the country. Network and revenue point of view, the management of the school programs has been paramount important for the University. Open School's programmes cover every remote corners of the country and provide the highest revenue to the university as such there is a saying that Open School is the "Cash Cow" for the University. In addition to the formal programmes, BOU has the open non-formal education (ONFE) programs which are linked to the Schools and in this way; Open School is assigned to provide ONFE on Basic Science and Mathematics.

2.3 Media used

Open School extensively uses print, radio-TV broadcasts at the national chunk and tutorial supports services near to the learners place. The program curriculum is at par to the conventional curriculum; not only that, this is University's policy and that's why; the School changes the syllabus of the courses when there is a change in the National Textbook and Curriculum Board (NCTB). SSC and HSC curriculum do not have vocational courses; but only the JSC Programme curriculum is coupled with the vocational courses and ICT learning materials, in a limited range, are used at the ODL centres. Production of print materials involves a procurement process which is at par to the government purchase procurement; that's why, process always delayed and learners almost every year suffer from the late delivery of the learning materials.

2.3 Launching new and revising ongoing course

In BOU, the formal approval processes ensure that individual course proposals from the School conform to the agreed policy and practice in terms of the University's Academic Planning Criteria and the requirements of the Academic Planning Management Cycle. Programme approval passes through a process which includes Academic Planning Committee (ACP), Academic Council (AC) and Board of Governors (syndicate). The University maintains the same procedure for all the programmes including programmes of the Open School. Working Committee conducts a Need Assessment Survey (NAS) to identify the demand for the Programme through questionnaire survey and/or focus group discussion (FGD). The NAS focuses on curriculum, syllabus, and assessment etc. Before the program is due to be presented a formal and more detailed proposal is drawn up, based on the results of the NAS, for approval by the Academic Planning Committee and then by the full Academic Board such as School Committee, Academic Council (AC) and Board of Governors (BOG) i.e the Syndicate, the highest body of the University.

The School Curriculum Committee is one of the authorities in the University and its Chairperson is appointed by the Vice Chancellor. The Committee:

- approves detailed syllabus and method of assessment, the structure and relationship of the course components, their tutorial, broadcast, and resource requirements and any relevant requirements to be specified in the appropriate regulations;
- appoint members of staff to all Course Teams, including the Course Team Chair, subject to ratification by the Curriculum Committee;
- appoint external course reviewers in the context of guidelines laid down by the Academic Council.

Course materials are tested on group of students as a part of the try-out. Courses are revised in the light of student/tutor feedback collected through surveys, focus group discussion and through extensive informal review process. This process is strictly maintained which is of quality assurance (QA) by itself. This QA is applied to the academic content - the teaching points of the subject matter, and the examination and assessment policy linked to the central policy of the University as a whole. Course Team consists of coordinator, external writers, broadcast specialists, if required; editor and illustrators. Coordinators processes administrative works and reports to the OS Dean. Therefore, Dean has been the Chief Coordinator of the School.

The Course Team carries the responsibility for ensuring the quality of the School's teaching of each course. It has a range of tasks:

- developing of subject matter of the course;
- identifying for teaching points and learner support;
- creating and implementing of the appropriate assessment for the course;
- ensuring the production of high quality teaching materials;
- planning, implementing, monitoring and reviewing the presentation of the course to learners.

An editor comments not only on the composed material, but also advises authors on the way the information is presented. University Authority appoints reviewer who is of sufficient seniority,

experience and academic reputation—normally a person at professorial level, or of acknowledged academic distinction. The reviewer checks the content and certifies the text for publication. In fact, reviewer is the referee of the text that means he/she may cancel or release the materials for publication at BOU. Reviewer's decision is always final and his/her name is not printed in the texts. In addition, names of the writers and editor are not disclosed to the reviewer and review report is permanently reserved for future reference. The Open School always faces a problem, at the time of political changes, with the printing of texts of History, Social Science and Political Science as they are highly national history sensitive. To solve this problem the School is to revise the texts using the same process what is required to maintain for the new course.

3 Students Support Services (SSS)

3.1 Tutorial sessions

The Open School provides tutorial sessions to the learners at the tutorial centres (TCs) that are located throughout the country, and each one is attached to one of the 12 RRCs. The formal responsibility for the appointment of tutors rests with RRC Directors, advised by members of respective academic schools. There appears to be a largely consistent pattern of bi-weekly face-to-face (f2f) tutorials for all courses for 20 weeks per year, presumably 20 per year per course. Special local practical activities in some courses are also held at the TCs. RRC monitors the TC activities; but there should have a monitoring cell at the school.

Mostly formal schools and colleges (both government and private) are widely used for conducting tutorial sessions at the weekend as a part of collaborative relations already built through a Ministerial order. Teachers from the respective schools/colleges work for the BOU-OS as tutors. Initially, the collaboration was formed through Ministerial order and at present, normally, the formal schools/colleges apply for showing interest to be the TC of BOU-OS as per the criteria fixed with recommendation of the CO and RRC Heads respectively. The School selects through a Committee consisting member from OS members and officials from the SSS Department. Finally, the University Authority approves for operation. BOU doesn't pay for the facility used for tutorials; but only tutors are paid for conducting tutorial sessions in Friday. It is necessary to mention that the TCs should have an MOU with the University so that role of the parties concerned can be clearly identified.

3.2 ICT supports

Current government is implementing the Digital-Bangladesh agenda and its impact on the BOU system is tremendous. Therefore, Open School plans for digital content development so that it can be used for the learners as ICT-enabled learners' supports. This has been big challenge for the school. At the moment the School aims to develop the

3.2.1 Radio-TV broadcasts

BOU obtained allocation of airtime on national radio and television. Direct costs of the programme are quite modest as BOU does not pay any broadcasting fee to Bangladesh radio or Bangladesh Television. This chunk is allocated to each School each week regardless of how many students or how many programmes each school has. The Open School broadcasts radio and TV programmes to courses which courses would most benefit from access to which medium. As mention earlier that BOU campus is 30 km far from the Capital city and the media centre is located at the campus where the most of the reputed presenter are not willing to record the programme because it takes nearly two hours to travel for heavy traffic. This has been the burning issue for the School and the University as a whole.

3.2.2 Virtual Interactive Classroom (VIC)

The BOU-OS runs VIC program to make a video interactive without direct use of Internet for the English course of the Higher Secondary Certificate (SSC) program of the School. This

methodology is new at the BOU although it runs TV broadcast on the national television called Bangladesh Television (BTV) in a particular chunk for University since its inception in 1993. The method uses mobiles as the interactivity tool and BOU enters into the m-learning through this methodology. BOU has tremendous opportunity for making interactive videos for its different programs which may change the learning activity of the open school learners. OS has a plan for increase this interactivity video for other courses particularly urban based learners who, sometimes, live in highly remote area. This programme has been developed under the partnership arrangement with the Orebro University, Sweden.

4 Learners' Assessments

Assessment of the learners of the SSC and HSC programmes is summative in nature and done by the Examination Committee (EC) which is responsible for assuring compliance with the University's academic standards. The University appoints, particularly for the Open School, external examiners to each examination for two reasons: a) to assist in ensuring that academic standards are comparable with the formal Board of Examination, and b) to provide an external scrutiny of the assessment methods. The University subscribes to the Code of Practice on External Examining and in particular on the appointment of external examiners. Like the formal examination Board, the University conducts both SSC and HSC examinations as a public examination and as a result, public security press, local administration, government treasury are involved. Examiners are prioritized as Open School faculties, other school faculties of the BOU, the tutors and the teachers of the respective field. Examination Department conducts the administration of the overall examination in support with the Open School and Tutorial Centres.

5 Partnership program

Asina Development Bank (ADB) identified NGOs as one of the stakeholders of the BOU and mentioned in the project document entitled BOU PP as:

"The NGOs working in the field of environmental stabilization, health care, skills training, functional literacy etc. will also be the potential target beneficiaries"
[ADB, 1993].

As a result, after a quite a long time, BOU developed a collaborative relation with the NGO Coalition, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) for piloting the JSC programme for the disadvantaged children who graduated from the NGO/community schools run by the NGOs under their innovative way. Management of this program is different from the other OS programmes. As per the JSC project, BOU is the academic manager and the CAMPE is the financial manager of the programme and provide the administrative support in the field with secretarial services.

6 Conclusion

The Open School programmes are highly successful program as every year there is increase in the number of enrolments and provide highest revenue for the University. Through its programmes the School developed country-wide networks and entered every corners of the country to increase access and equity. BOU provides special attention for management of the open schooling as it directly relates to the main objective of the University. The School has its own quality checking so that programmes become marketable in comparison with the conventional school programmes. In conclusion, it can be said that in the School, the process of any activity is quality assurance (QA) by itself.

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