

A STUDY OF LEARNERS PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS BA/BSS PROGRAM OF SSSL OF BANGLADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

In the present day open and distance education has become a significant way of the development of higher education. Bangladesh Open University (BOU), the only public institution in Bangladesh offers several formal and non-formal programs from secondary to post graduate level through distance mode. The main objectives of BOU's program is to provide flexible and need based education particularly to the rural and disadvantaged groups like woman, agricultural workers, unemployed youths, uneducated adults, on-the-job people etc. The School of Social Science, Humanities and Language (SSHL) at the BOU offers Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Social Science (BA/BSS) to create efficient and skilled manpower in the country.

The focuses of this paper is to find out learners' views and attitude towards BA/BSS program at BOU. In this study, 187 respondents were randomly selected from 15 tutorial centers of 2 Regional Resource centers (RRCs) of BOU. The study showed that 62% learners were male and the mean age of the learners was 34.05 years (minimum 22; maximum 54). More than 50% learners were married and nearly half (47.6%) of them were private employees and 86.6% were Muslims. Amongst them, 72.2% were come from urban areas and residing around 23.08 km from the tutorial centers. Most (72%) of the learners of BA/BSS program stated that the program was as usual but 24.1% expressed that it was difficult to understand but 97.7% learners responded that text materials were up to the mark. Regarding the media programs, 61% of the learners gave their opinion that TV programs were at the level best but they wanted to watch these at the evening or night schedule. It was surprising that 26.2% of the learners had bitter experience with the services of RRCs. Finally, some measures have been proposed to offer effective and more popular educational program through BOU.

Keywords: Learners, SSSL, Perception, Attitudes and BOU.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is one of the developing countries in the world whose total population is now 156.1 million (up to July' 2010) and per capita income is \$750 annually (BBS, 2010). The growth rate of population is now 2.02 % (CIA World Factbook) and if the growth rate of population exists in this level, then after few years a fearful population figure will be found which will create a dangerous situation in a densely populated country like Bangladesh. The basic needs of human beings are Food, Shelter, Clothing, Education and Health. Education is the backbone of a nation. Education is not only a social and moral imperative; it is also an economic necessity. It has been considered that illiteracy is one of the most important parameters which cause socio-economic backwardness (Numan et al. 2007). In Bangladesh adult literacy rate is 53.68%, i.e. 46.32% population is illiterate (BBS, 2007). If we cannot minimize our illiteracy rate then we cannot create skill manpower. In this situation, a huge number of unskilled populations of Bangladesh will become a burden rather than human resource.

In open and distance education, the focus is on the needs of the people to whom the education message have addressed. The determination of the educational needs of the various groups such as dropouts, out-of school youth, on-the-job people, farmers, teachers, women, school and university students and illiterate adults is the starting point of distance education (Sharma, 1987). Open and distance education systems gives flexibility in choice of program and time for learners as well as for in-service personnel. Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is the only public sector university in Bangladesh that is providing a wide variety of education program by open and distance mode. Through formal and non-formal education programs it gives educational opportunities to the large section of population to help the development of human resource of the country.

BOU has 12 Regional Resource Centers (RRC), 80 Local Centers (LC) and more than 1300 Tutorial Centers (TC) to provide the distance education across the country. BOU has six schools of which the School of Social Science, Humanities and Language (SSHL) is one of them. The main objective of this school is to transform the country's vast human resources into educated and skilled manpower by extending to them a wide range of academic programs both formal and non-formal. At present SSHL offers BA/BSS, BELT, CELP, and CALP as formal programs which facilitate learners to gather knowledge relevant to their life and career. BA/BSS, BELT, CELP, CALP programs were launched in 2001, 1998, 1997, and 1994 respectively. As well as it also alert the general people by providing Non-formal programs includes Religion, Environmental issues, Ethics & Development; History & Culture, and Women in workforce. Among these program, BA/BSS program is a bachelor in degree program. This program consists of 60 credit hours and 6 semesters. The duration of each semester is 6 months and the total length of the program is three years.

This is the age of competition and to survive in the competition, education is the only way to prepare them. To create efficient manpower by achieving this higher degree is the main aim of BA/BSS program. This paper presents a study amongst the learners' of BA/BSS program of SSHL in BOU includes the area such as:

- the views of BA/BSS learners on printed text materials,
- learners' attitude towards the quality of BOU's TV program,
- Learners' opinion regarding tutorial service, services of LC and RRC and
- finally, recommend some possible measures for improving the existing program and maintenance of the quality of this program.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in School of Social Science Humanities and Language of Bangladesh Open University.

The total number of learners of BA/BSS program in SSSL was 57,196 whereas the total number of learners enrolled in the BA/BSS program was 18,982 in the academic year of 2008 (SSS 2008). Data was collected from 15 tutorial centers of two RRCs.

The duration of data collection was from August 2008 to October 2008. A cross-sectional study design based on randomly selected tutorial centres from Dhaka and Rangpur RRC of BOU were selected where the learners of BA/BSS program got admitted.

The entire list of learners of BA/BSS program served as sampling frame and the learners were randomly selected for the study. A structured questionnaire prepared in Bengali for the convenience of the respondents was distributed to the learners of SSSL.

The total sample size of the study was 187. In the questionnaire, learners were asked regarding their socio-demographic characteristics. Then respondents were asked about the opinion of the BA/BSS program in which program they were studying and the course fees of that program.

They were also asked about the quality of text materials, TV program and expected on-air time of the TV program. Finally, more or less similar questions related to the services of tutorial class, local centers and regional resource centers were included.

After data collection, it was keyed-in into the computer database and recorded properly. Data analysis was done using Statistical package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 12.0.

Limitations of the Study

Every research has its limitations. Present study was not also beyond of it. Data were collected several tutorial centers covering only two (02) RRC. It would be more accurate and generalized if data were collected from more TCs and RRCs.

FINDINGS

Demographic Profile Of The Learners

The demographic profiles of learners and detail descriptions shows in Table 1 are as follows:

Gender

This study showed that majority 62% (n=116) learners of BA/BSS program were male and 38% (n=71) were female.

Age Group

Distance education provides an opportunity to students of any age or level to learn at home or at places of work. The statement reflected in this study also. The study showed that the 38% of the learners belonged to the age group of 25 to 30 years and 36.9% learners belonged to the age group of 22 to 25 years. The mean age of the learners BA/BSS program was 34.05 years and ranged from 22 to 54 years.

Marital Status

In this study 51.3% of the respondents were married and 48.7% were single.

Table: 1
Demographic Characteristics of the learners of BA/BSS

| Variable | | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------|------------------|-----------|---------|
| Gender | Male | 116 | 62.0 |
| | Female | 71 | 38.0 |
| Age Groups | Below 25 years | 69 | 36.9 |
| | 25 to 30 years | 71 | 38.0 |
| | 31 to 35 years | 33 | 17.6 |
| | 36 to 40 years | 7 | 3.7 |
| | Above 40 years | 7 | 3.7 |
| Marital Status | Single | 91 | 48.7 |
| | Married | 96 | 51.3 |
| Occupation | Student | 39 | 20.9 |
| | Unemployed | 7 | 3.7 |
| | Govt. Employee | 19 | 10.2 |
| | Private Employee | 89 | 47.6 |
| | Business | 16 | 8.6 |
| | Others | 17 | 9.1 |
| Religion | Muslim | 162 | 86.6 |
| | Hindu | 22 | 11.8 |
| | Christian | 3 | 1.6 |
| Location of Residence | Urban | 136 | 72.7 |
| | Sub-urban | 11 | 5.9 |
| | Rural | 40 | 21.4 |
| Monthly Family Income | < 10000 Tk | 75 | 40.1 |
| | 10000 - 19999 | 75 | 40.1 |
| | 20000 - 29999 | 26 | 13.9 |
| | 30000 - 39999 Tk | 6 | 3.2 |
| | > 40000 Tk | 5 | 2.7 |
| | Total | 187 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, August to October, 2008

Occupation

In distance education, learners were came from different backgrounds. Amongst the learners 47.6% were private employees, 20.9% were only students, 10.2% of the learners were government employee, 9.1% learners came from other field and only 3.7% learners were unemployed.

Religion

This study showed that 86.6% learners were Muslims, 11.8% were Hindus and 1.6% was Christians.

Location of Residence

In this study, most of the learners were came from urban area (72.7%) and while 21.4% came from rural area. These learners were living and traveling on average 23.08 km (minimum 01 and maximum 100 km) surroundings from the tutorial centers where the tutorial sessions performed.

Monthly Family Income

Amongst the respondents, 80.2% have had total monthly family income within 20000 BD Tk. And 13.9% have had income of Tk.20000 to Tk.30000 and only 6% respondents have had high monthly family income that was Tk. 30000 or more.

Learners Opinion in the BA/BSS Program

Learners were asked to give their opinion on the present status of BA/BSS program where they were studying. The study showed in Fig.1 that near about 72% learners thought that this program was as usual, 24.1% expressed that this program was difficult and 4.3% students expressed it was easy to understand.

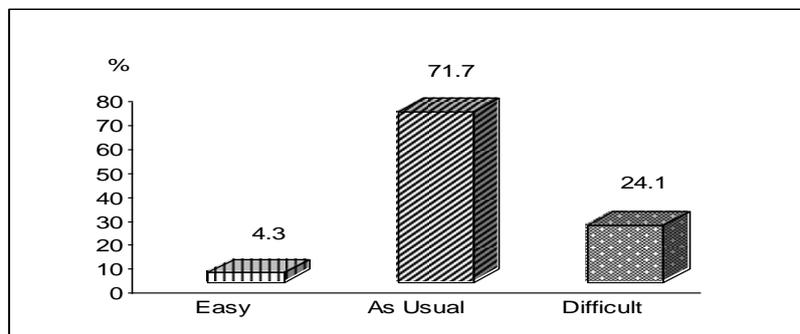


Figure: 1
Learners' Opinion about BA/BSS Program

Learners Opinion Regarding Course Fees

Figure: 2 showed that amongst the learners near about 44% learners expressed that the course fees of this program was expensive, 35% thought that it was acceptable, 19% said that it was too expensive and only 2% learners thought that the course fees was cheap. This study also reflected that it was difficult to bear the course fees by majority of the learners.

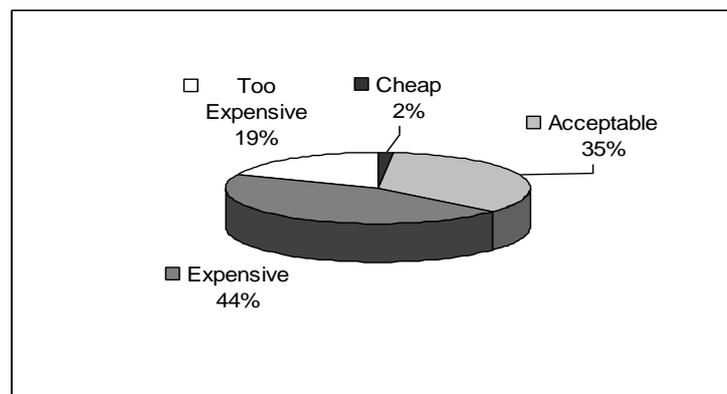


Figure: 2
Learners Opinion about Course Fees of BA/BSS Program

Learners Attitude Regarding Quality of Text Materials

In the distance education, printed course material constitutes the mainstay of teaching. This would be covered a major part of the required support to the learner. Print material was made available to most of the students of this program through the tutorial centers. Table 2 showed the learners observations regarding the quality of the BOU text materials.

Table: 2
Evaluation of Text Materials of BA/BSS Program

| Opinion | Learners | |
|--------------|----------|-------|
| | <i>n</i> | % |
| Low Quality | 7 | 3.7 |
| Acceptable | 42 | 22.5 |
| As Usual | 59 | 31.6 |
| Satisfactory | 79 | 42.2 |
| Total | 187 | 100.0 |

The study showed in Table 2 that more than 95% of the learners expressed that the quality of text materials was satisfactory, as usual and acceptable whereas only 3.7% of the learners said that it was low quality.

Learners Views on TV Program of BA/BSS Program

Broadcasting by TV is a popular means of communication in distance teaching system because of its universal accessibility (Chander, 1991). By watching educational TV program learners get necessary knowledge and information about their courses.

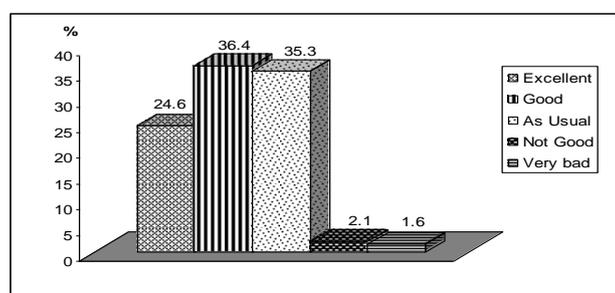


Figure: 3
Learners Attitudes Regarding Quality of TV Program

The study showed in Fig 3 that 36.4% learners expressed the TV program of BA/BSS program was good, 24.6% expressed that it was excellent and 35.3% said that it was as usual, where as only 3.7% stated that TV program was not up to the mark.

Learners Opinion on the Schedule of TV Program

At present, on-air schedule of BOU's TV program is at morning (i.e. 7.15 am to 8.00 am and 10.00 am to 10.25 am). But this study revealed in Table 3 that 69.5% of the learners desire that TV program of the BA/BSS program should be broadcast at night (6 to 9 pm) and 17.1% expressed that it should be broadcast at evening schedule (3 to 5 pm).

Table: 3
Learners Views towards Suitable On-Air time of TV program

| Occupation | Morning | | Noon | | Evening | | Night | |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % |
| Student | 5 | 12.8 | 2 | 5.1 | 12 | 30.8 | 20 | 51.3 |
| Unemployed | 1 | 14.3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 85.7 |
| Government Employee | 1 | 5.3 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 26.3 | 13 | 68.4 |
| Private Employee | 5 | 5.6 | 5 | 5.6 | 7 | 7.9 | 72 | 80.9 |
| Business | 1 | 6.3 | 1 | 6.3 | 2 | 12.5 | 12 | 75.0 |
| Others | 2 | 11.8 | 2 | 11.8 | 6 | 35.3 | 7 | 41.2 |
| Total | 15 | 8.0 | 10 | 5.3 | 32 | 17.1 | 130 | 69.5 |

Learners Attitude towards Student Support Services

The success of distance education system depends on the quality of student support services. Table 4 showed that majority of the learners expressed the quality of the services provided by BOU's tutorial centers, local centers and regional resource centers was as usual.

Table: 4
Learners Attitude Regarding Student Support Services

| Items | % distribution of Responses | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------|----------|----------|----------|
| | Excellent | Good | As Usual | Not Good | Very Bad |
| Tutorial Services | 16.0 | 29.9 | 36.4 | 11.8 | 5.9 |
| Local Center's Services | 11.2 | 28.3 | 40.6 | 11.8 | 8.0 |
| RRC Services | 15.0 | 28.9 | 29.9 | 18.7 | 7.5 |

In this study 36.4% learners expressed that tutorial services was as usual, 29.9% said that it was good and 17.7% stated it was not up to the mark. Similarly, the service of local centers and regional centers were good and as usual. But among these three services 26.2% (18.7 and 7.5) of the learners had a bitter experience with the RRC services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite some limitations, the study has an important implication for researcher. For improving the existing program and maintenance of the quality of this program following recommendations could be proposed:

- Printing text materials must be self instructional, activity based and more learner-oriented. As well as easy language should be used in the text materials.
- Audio-visual program which broadcasting by BOU media center could be more attractive and interactive. Besides this, Audio program should be increased.
- BOU can rethink about the on-air timetable of the TV program and at this point further more survey should be needed.
- The attitude of the Student Support Services should be always positive towards the learners and should be more active to promote this program.

- Finally, to promote distance learning system as a whole monitoring and evaluation system should be needed.

CONCLUSION

The educational system plays a vital role in a country's development. In the present day distance education is also an important mode of acquisition of knowledge and up-gradation of qualification.

Distance education can be more learners oriented if distance learners are aware of the problems, needs, attitudes and characteristics of their learners (Numan et al 2008). This study revealed learners' views on BA/BSS program.

It also appeared in this study that the factors related to self-development of learners need more support from student support services. Thus, policy makers and researchers should be needed looking for different ways of providing better and wider service for the learners.

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