STRATEGIC INTERVENTION OF ODL IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

Education has been considered as a priority sector and a great challenge to the Bangladesh Government, with a view to transforming human potential into a productive workforce. The conventional face to face education system is not enough to cope with the need of an ever increasing population, rapid changes in human knowledge and the global context being changed. Education through open and distance learning (ODL) has been recognized as an important alternative in the country. Bangladesh Open University (BOU), established in 1992, has been mandated to improve the quality, relevance and efficiency of the education system with a view to eradicating illiteracy, developing human resources and alleviating poverty in the country.

This article outlines the services provided by BOU, and explains how BOU utilizes its infrastructure and support services to deliver formal and non-formal programmes in basic and applied sciences, agriculture, technology, health, environment, education, language, teaching education, literature, population and gender issues to create awareness and promote knowledge. The impact of the programmes are reviewed and evaluated, based on feedback studies with target groups, and with particular reference to ODL in agriculture and rural development.

INTRODUCTION

Conventional, face to face education can no longer meet the requirements of development in the current processes of rapid changes in knowledge and changes in the global economy. Conventional systems are limited with regards to expansion, access, equity and cost-effectiveness, and do not have sufficient infrastructure and facilities for providing education and training at all levels (Matubber and Rahman, 2005).

While open and distance learning (ODL) extends learning opportunities to people at different levels in society, it also supports professional development through increasing technical skills and assisting the general public to keep abreast of current topics and scientific and technological advances.

So, the possibility of using ODL rather than the traditional system has become a source of interest, further reinforced by the development of information and communication technologies.

Learners even in remote places have been able to access the uptodate knowledge and information and ICTs have enhanced learners' access to academic institutions and to educationists (Bazlur Rashid *et.el.,* 2009).

ODL is flexibly designed instructional education that uses a variety of technologies depending on the need and capacity of the students or target group. E-learning is progressively being used in Bangladesh (Bazlur Rashid, 2006), accompanied by the growth of online activity in general, such as internet banking, use of cyber cafes, mobile phones, Tele Talk, SIM etc. (Islam and Selim, 2006). Technology-based ODL has already supplemented face to face education in many advanced countries of the modern world. But whether such an ODL system is affordable economically, socially, culturally and politically in developing countries like Bangladesh, where 44% of the population is living below the absolute poverty line, remains a big question (Tarafdar and Alam. 2001; Taleb *et al*, 2004).

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with 150 million people living in an area of 55,599 square miles (2850 per square mile) in 2007 (Anonymous, 2007). The birth rate (2.15% per annum) inhibits the strategic development of accommodation, health, economy, education and infrastructure. However this vast population is also a major resource.

How it can be transformed into a productive force is a great challenge for the government. Education has become a priority sector, and is a fundamental aspect to any effective programme aiming to build the quality of human life. It is recognized as a human right for all regardless of gender, race, age, location, socio-economic status, disability etc.

Realizing this human right cannot be achieved through formal education alone. So, the Government of Bangladesh has been trying to meet the 2015 Millennium Goal education target by emphasizing non-formal education, including using ODL. Non-formal education has been considered as an essential life long process of education for all. In addition, there is particular emphasis on women's education. Women's participation in nation building is still insignificant because of the lack of educational opportunity (Sufia Begum, 2003).

Thus BOU has been playing an important role in the overall education strategy of the country, both in formal and non-formal education and in aiming to include previously excluded sectors of the population. Numan *et al.,* (2007) report that 1,31,068 students were awarded a certificate or degree from BOU in 2005, and, by 2006, nearly 24% of students enrolled were female. ODL is thus enabling women to gain education, and eventually to contribute in new ways to socio-economic development (Salma Karim, 2004).

Distance education was initiated in 1956 when the Directorate of Education, Ministry of Education was assigned to distribute 200 radio sets to the educational institutes of the country. Then the Audio-Visual Education Centre (AVEC) was established in 1962 and primary school teachers were trained how to use such audio-visual materials in the class room. With a view to improving the school education through Radio/TV, a National Institute of Educational Media and Technology (NIEMT) -a multi-media organization - was established in April 1983, under the Ministry of Education. NIEMT used electronic and print media materials for disseminating both formal and non-formal education throughout the country (Kanti Dey, 2004). A School Broadcasting Programme (SBP) was also started in 1980.

Then AVEC and SBP were merged into NIEMT. Subsequently Bangladesh Institute of Distance Education (BIDE) was established in 1985 and it acted as the pioneer institute to establish ODL in the country, creating the impetus to establish an Open University in Bangladesh (Sirajul Islam, 2005), and the BIDE was subsequently merged into BOU. BOU has been functioning since 1995. Thus ODL has been recognized as an important alternative in the country and particularly best suited for dropout learners, those in lower class occupations, office workers, house wives and those who have not been able to study in the conventional institutions/universities. Bangladesh Open University (BOU) was established in Gazipur, 32 km north of the capital city Dhaka, both to provide greater access to education ranging from pre-university to tertiary level and to deliver and disseminate multi dimensional formal and non-formal education to deprived populations in remote areas (Islam and Numan, 2005), to:

- **Extend opportunities of education to all classes of people.**
- **Create skilled man power by improving the quality of education.**
- **Meet the emergent higher education and training needs (teacher education, agriculture, technical and vocational education using communication technologies) (Ershadul Bari, 2005).**

Furthermore, it has been stated in the Project Profile (Anonymous, 1997) that the main purpose of establishing BOU is: "to increase equitable access to education, to develop the human resources of the country and to improve the quality, relevance and efficiency of the education system. It will also support the Government's current and long term education policy on eradication of illiteracy and thus helps to alleviate poverty of the country. The role of BOU will be primarily to cater to those sections of the population that are currently excluded from the conventional education system for a wide variety of reasons. The potential clientele of BOU will therefore, include significant number of students of rural areas, particularly women, out of school and adults who must do work to support their families." The following sections describe the strategic intervention of ODL and of BOU. They also outline some of the current limitations and challenges, and the needs of further policy development to enable ODL to have greater impact on meeting educational needs in Bangladesh. The next section describes the BOU structures and how they function. Section 3 outlines the academic programmes. In Section 4, the paper discusses some of the problems and challenges of carrying out ODL in the Bangladesh context, both of a pedagogic and infrastructural nature. Section 5 concludes by exhorting policy and decision makers to commit greater effort into realising the potential of ODL in the development of Bangladesh.

ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION

The Head of the Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh is the Chancellor of BOU, and presides over convocations and confers degrees and honorary degrees. The VC, Pro-VC and Treasurer are appointed by the Chancellor. BOU is run by the chief executive leadership of the Vice Chancellor (VC) who presides over the meetings of all the statutory bodies. There are 3 statutory bodies: the Board of Governors (BOG), the Academic Council (AC) and the Finance Committee (FC).

The BOG is the chief decision making body while the AC is the highest body for all academic decisions and all financial matters are decided by the FC. BOG is constituted with a total of 13 members, including: VC (chairman), Pro-VC, Treasurer, Education Secretary (MOE), Information Secretary (MOI), an eminent educationist, an important business man, and two other professionals (nominated by the Chancellor), two Deans and two Professors of BOU (nominated by the BOG).

AC has the following members:

- **VC as chairman**
- **Pro-VC**
- **all Deans of Schools**
- **all Professors of BOU**
- **Librarian**
- **6) Controller of Examination**
- **10 educated professionals nominated by the Chancellor**
- **10 senior staff members nominated by BOG, including 3 Regional Directors.**
- **FC is constituted by:**
  - **VC as the Chairman**
  - **Pro-VC**
  - **4 staff members of BOU , nominated by BOG, among whom at least two will be experts/specialists in finance and administration**
  - **a Dean nominated by the AC (5) two specialists in finance and administration, nominated by the BOG.**

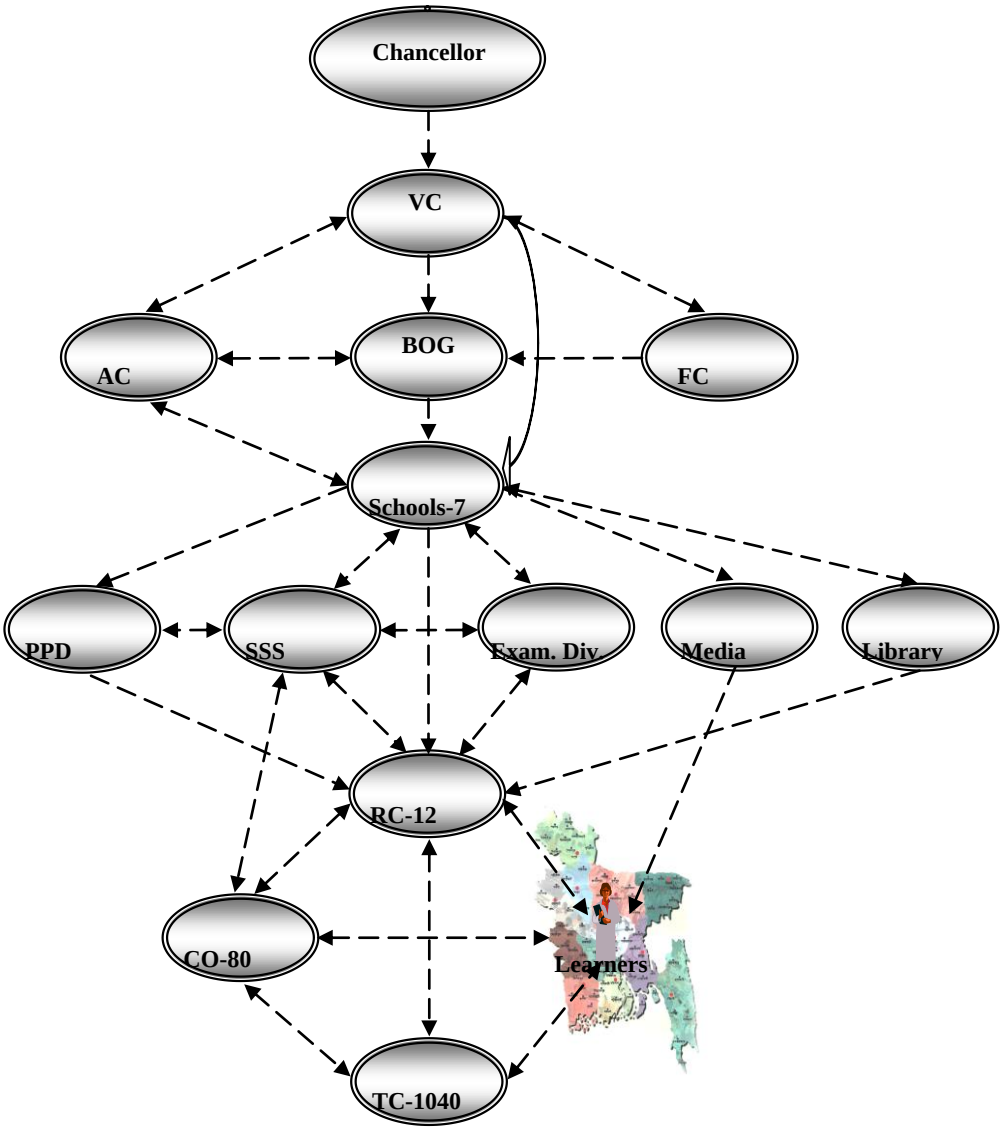

Figure:1
Administrative Pedagogical network of ODL at BOU.

The academic schools each headed by respective Deans are the pedagogic leaders. There are 7 academic schools. The main academic stream of each school is interconnected with the support services of sections like Printing, Publishing and Documentation (PPD), Student Support Service (SSS) and Examination Division (Exam. Div.). Learners are directly linked with their respective Tutorial Centre and Coordinating Office (CO) for their tutorial services and all other academic administrative affairs, which are under the Regional Centre (RC) in turn linked with the SSS division at the headquarters (Figure: 1).

RCs and COs are the main contact points for the students/learners regarding information, admission, registration, examination, results, and so on. They look after the students' academic affairs by delivering the instructional materials/modules, audio-video cassettes, and other support services.

There is also a unique Media Centre (MC) with excellent facilities at BOU for audio-video production and broadcasting. For audio and video programmes broadcast on Radio and TV, and for other related programmes and queries related to teleconferencing and telecommunication, learners have direct contact with the schools. Thus BOU has a vast network of physical and infrastructural resources to support ODL and to disseminate knowledge to students/learners spread all over the country.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES

There is an academic career development ladder of multidisciplinary academic programmes that starts from junior level, the junior secondary certificate (JSC) for five pass dropout students. It leads and ensures the continuity of an individual's study to successively higher levels up to Masters level (Figure: 2).

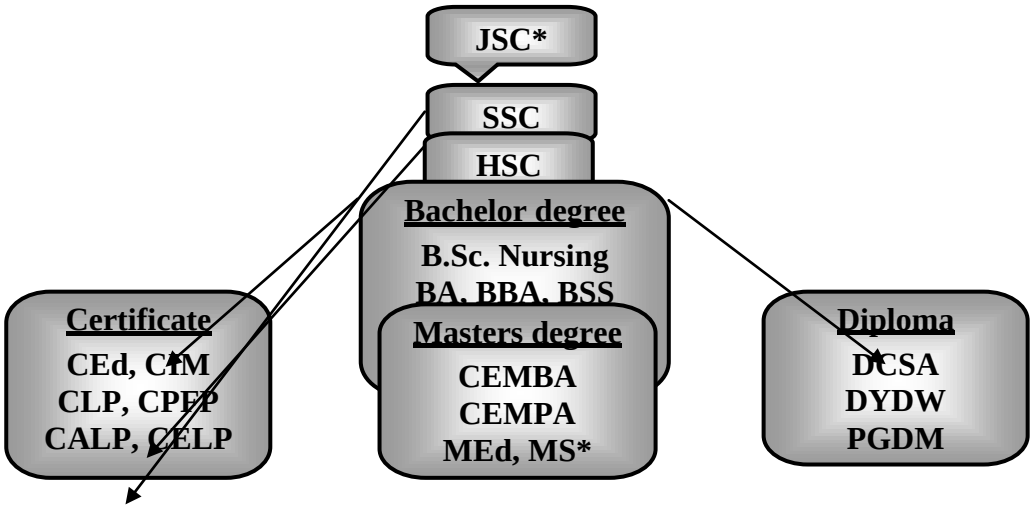

Figure: 2
Academic career development ladder through ODL at BOU
(*Under process and yet to be launched at the time of writing. The acronyms are explained under the outline of the Schools' academic programmes below.)

So far about 24 formal and a large number of non-formal programmes have been, or are being, launched and some of them are already in the pipeline. Various Certificates, Diplomas, Bachelors and Masters programmes are offered by the 7 different schools (Figure: 3).

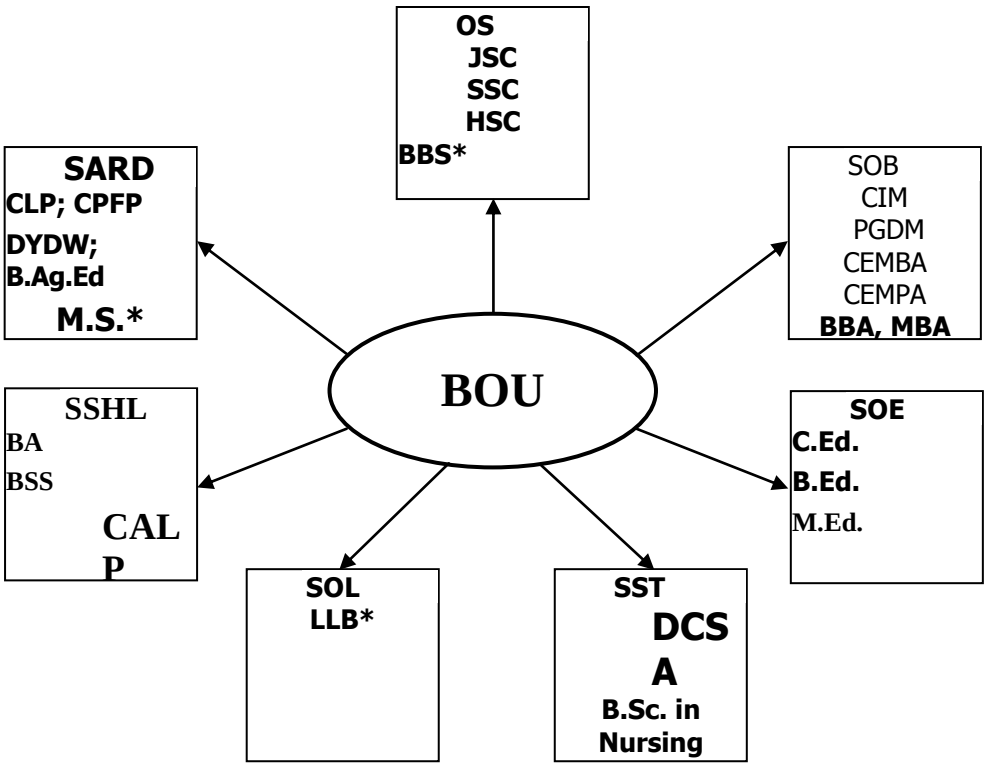

Figure: 3
Distribution of academic programmes of the 7 different schools of BOU
(*Programmes are in the pipeline and/or yet to be launched)

- **Open School (OS): This school offers the following programmes -**
  - **Junior School Certificate (JSC)**
  - **Secondary School Certificate (S.S.C)**
  - **Higher Secondary Certificate (H.S.C)**
  - **Bachelor of Business Studies (B.B.S)**
- **School of Business (SOB): With the aim of delivering business education and producing skilled manpower, there are altogether 5 different ongoing programmes.**
  - **Certificate in Management (CIM)**
  - **Post Graduate Diploma in Management (PGDM)**
  - **Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA)**
  - **Masters of Business Administration (MBA)**
  - **Commonwealth Executive Masters of Business Administration (CEMBA)**
  - **Commonwealth Executive Master of Public Administration (CEMPA).**
- **School of Education (SOE): To train high quality teachers, the SOE has been working with the following programmes (ongoing).**
  - **Certificate in Education (C.Ed.)**
  - **Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)**
  - **Masters of Education (M.Ed.)**
- **School of Science and Technology (SST): This School is also responding to national development needs. It offers a diploma and a Bachelor degree programme. The programmes are;**
  - **B.Sc. in Nursing**
  - **Diploma in Computer Science and Application (DCSA)**
  - **5).School of Law (SOL): The SOL is a newly established school and launching a LLB programme is in the pipeline but expecting very soon.**

- **School of Social Science Humanities and Language (SSHL): It offers two Certificate programmes and two Bachelor programmes.**
  - **Certificate in English Language & Proficiency (CELP)**
  - **Certificate in Arabic Language & Proficiency (CALP)**
  - **Bachelor of Arts (BA)**
  - **Bachelor of Social Science (BSS)**
- **School of Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD): This is one of the most important academic schools in terms of responding to national development needs. We thus discuss its programmes in more depth.**

It is well known that Bangladesh is highly dependent on agriculture. About 80% of the total population live in rural and remote areas and are involved in different agricultural activities. However this population is not easily able to access good, needs-based education, up to date practical information and contemporary technical know-how. Educational provision by the conventional system through in-service technicians and other resource persons in the existing public as well as private Agricultural Organization/Institutions such as Agricultural Training Institutes (ATIs) and Graduate Training Institute (GTI) of BAU and BAU Extension Centre (BAUEC) etc. is quite meager and does not meet the need. SARD has responded to this gap and has been working since 1997 to demonstrate the potential of using ODL to provide needs-based education in Bangladesh.

Formal and Non-Formal Programmes of SARD

SARD offers both formal and non-formal programmes. The formal provision (two Certificates, one Diploma and one Bachelor degree) are outlined in Table 1. In addition, a BSc and MSc in Agriculture are being proposed or developed due to fulfill the crying need of the higher agricultural education in the country.

Table: 1 Illustration of formal academic programmes of SARD

Courses Offered	Credit Hours	Qualification of Studentship	Admission & Study Semester	Total period of Academic Calendar (Semesters)
1. Bachelor of Agricultural Education (BAgEd)	96	H.S.C (Science or Agriculture) or 3 years Diploma in Agriculture	January-June & July-December	6
2. Diploma in Youth in Development Work (DYDW)	41	Degree/Graduate	-do-	1.5
3. Certificate in Livestock & Poultry (CLP)	16	S.S.C	-do-	1
4. Certificate in Pisciculture & Fish Processing (CPFP)	15	S.S.C	-do-	1

There are 10 non-formal programmes in SARD. The programmes include the achievements of higher agricultural researches and up to date technologies related to the formal studies of the concerned programmes. More over these enable to increase inspiration of skills to the general mass even at remote rural areas to learn and adapt their vocational expertise, particularly important for the challenges of poverty alleviation.

- **Production and Storage of Healthy Seeds**
- **Cultivation and Management of Field Crops**
- **Nursery, Gardening, Forestry and Irrigation Management**
- **Crop Diseases and Insect Pests**
- **Pisciculture and Fish Processing**
- **Fish Diseases and Control**
- **Poultry and Livestock Husbandry**
- **Livestock Diseases and Their Prevention**
-

- **Role of Agri-involved Females in the Context of Family and Social Welfare Activities**
- **Role of Imam and Teachers in Agriculture and Rural Development**

Non-formal programmes of other schools:
These programmes are also being launched as a compatible expertise of the relevant technologies of the concerned programmes. The relevant students and the general people are encouraged with the current technical know-how regarding the education, research and the nation-building activities etc.

OS : 1. Basic Science
2. Mathematics
SOB : Preparation and presentation of food
SOE : 1. Maternity and child care
2. Environment
SST : 1. Population studies
2. Health, Nutrition
SSHL : Religion and Ethics
SOL : Nil
(Source: Kanti Dey, 2003).Pedagogic Delivery Matrix

Open and distance learning at BOU comprises a number of distinct teaching and learning methods that make it significantly different from the conventional system. At present, the delivery matrix includes principally the course materials along with audio-video cassettes and tutorials services.

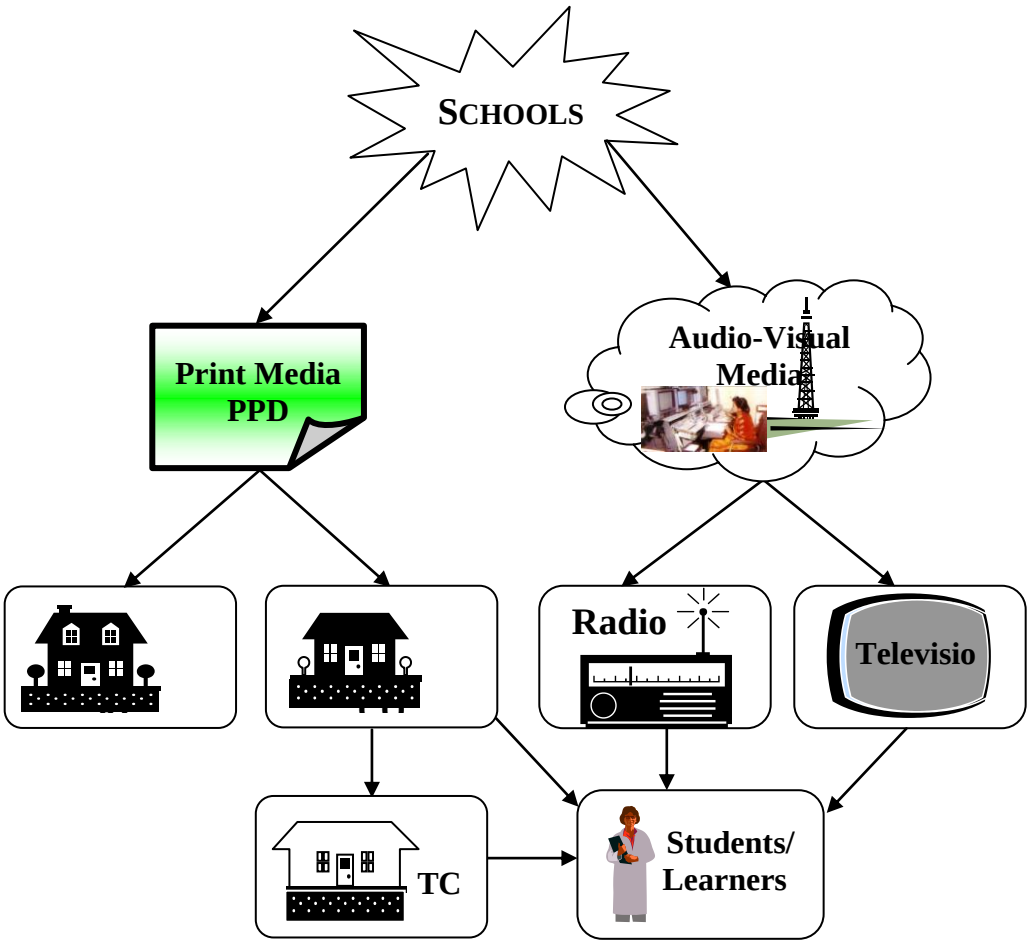

Figure: 4 Pedagogy delivery matrix of ODL in BOU

The programmes are also broadcasted in the national radio and television. Counseling and monitoring through telephone, audio and video teleconferencing plays an important role as well but in practice the facilities are too limited. The ODL delivery system is shown in Figure: 4.

INTERVENTION AND DISCUSSION

Enrolment

BOU has been offering learning opportunities to all those who missed such opportunities in conventional educational institutions. In particular, the target audience includes employed and unemployed, school drop-outs, disadvantaged people, school teachers, agricultural workers, young people, health and family planning workers, and so on. Programmes are both formal and non-formal, and needs-based, to provide people with the skills and qualifications to contribute to poverty alleviation as well as nation building.

Many types of professional have also been able to take advantage of ODL and use the new technologies to boost their own status, irrespective of age, religion, gender or location.. One study of students in the M.Ed programme showed that improvement of professional knowledge and skills were the main reasons for enrolling for the majority of students (91.4%) (Figure: 5).

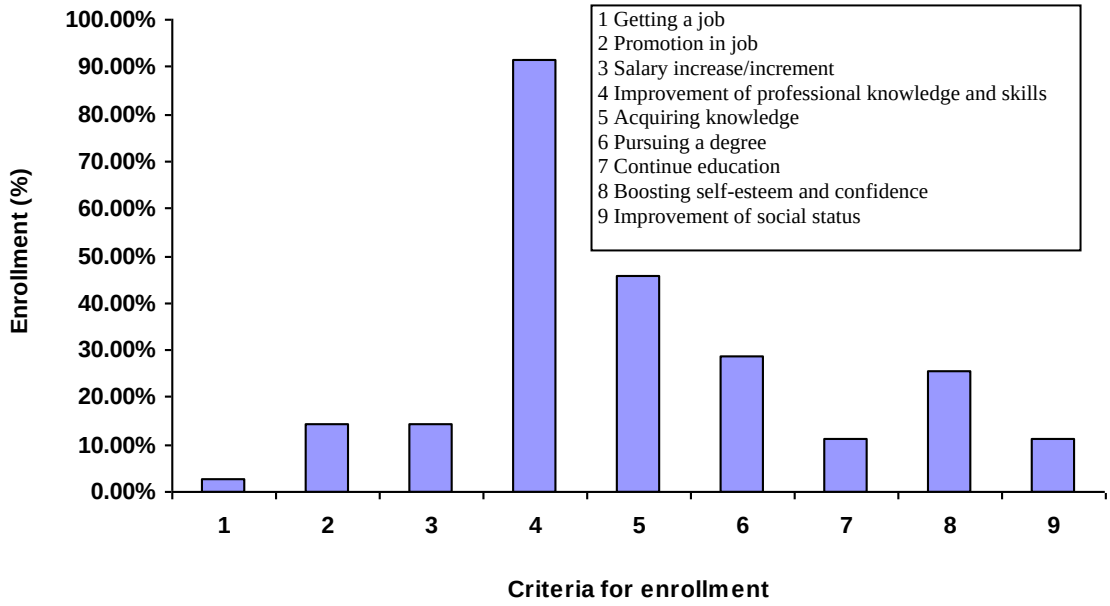

Figure: 5
Students' reasons for enrolling in MEd. course in ODL system of BOU
(Source- Selina Akhter and Monira Jahan, 2001)

However, in spite of the positive aims and potential of BOU, the enrollment data are not promising at the time of writing. A recent study showed that, out of 19 existing programmes, only 4 - namely SSC, HSC, MBA and BA/BSS - had rising enrollment figures, while the trend for rest of the programmes was declining (Numan *et al*, 2007). Some programmes were continuing only to cover their overhead costs. Overall, if these trends persist, some programmes will have to cease because of lack of students (ibid). Where enrollment is rising, evidence suggests that this is because students want to upgrade their degrees and skills in their field of interest and to seek higher degrees. In these cases, there is also great demand in the job market.

But Numan *et al.* (2007) have estimated that some programmes, like BELT, CIM, CELP and PGDM, have already been in measurable conditions and others, such as BEd, BSN, CALP, CEd, CEMBA and DCSA, may be discontinued before the Millennium Goal target date of 2015. Yet others are fluctuating while some remain steady. As per observation on the direct contact with the students and from different sources including Numan *et al.* (2007) these differences might be due to the following reasons.

- **A fall in demand in the job market.**
- **Lack of enough student motivation system and lack of proper awareness of the target group. and/or.**
- **Administrative and academic internal problems such as transfer, defunct of the software, late in printing the course materials, transportation etc. and also lack of favourable co-operation from the personnel.**
- **Disillusionment and frustration of students at the delay in processing results, and slowness of responses and co-operation from BOU.**
- **High rate of student dropout.**
- **Lack of low-cost, adequate and accessible infrastructure and communication technology in some backyard areas.**
- **Lack of proper commitment by students because of the difficult socio-economic and socio-political atmosphere such as hartal, transportation disruption etc.**
- **Fluctuating trend of enrolments which affect the level, duration and cost-effectiveness of programmes.**
- **In the cases of challenging courses like English, Mathematics and practical-based science courses, students demand intensive and direct contact with their tutors but sometimes may not be in the range for the remote students.**
- **There has been competition from other private universities/institutes, which offer similar but shorter and lower cost programmes such as BEd, CEd, Med, and which have been able to attract students who may have otherwise studied at BOU.**
- **Political instability and unrest affect the educational institutions sometimes cause backlogs and disruption in the academic calendar.**

Despite all these limitations, it is expected that, as one of the mega-universities, BOU will be responsible for mass education in Bangladesh (Islam *et al.,* 2006; Islam and Selim, 2006a).

Pedagogy and Delivery

BOU provides mixed-media packages which combine printed course materials with audio-visual cassettes. The printed materials use the techniques of self directed study to enable students to understand course content without the help of tutors. A key element is the self-assessment, which helps develop analytical skills and independent thinking at the end of each lesson or theme in the modules. All course materials are supplied to students at admission/registration time from their RCs and COs. The delivery of these and other supporting materials is outlined in Table 2.

Table: 2 The instructional strategies of ODL at BOU.

Components	Transmission
1. Print Media	RC, CO, TC (SSC & HSC)
2. Radio	Broadcast
3. TV	Telecast
4. Audio-visual cassettes	RCs
5. Library Facilities	BOU, RC, CO, TC libraries
6. Practical	TCs
7. Winter/Summer schools	TCs

Source: Kanti Dey, 2003.

Again, there is some divergence between expectations and reality. For example, in spite of the importance of the print media (and their design), there are deficiencies in delivery and in students' understanding of course content. Selina Akhter (2004) has reported the following limitations:

- **Most students do not receive the course materials in time.**
- **Language is not always simple and difficulties arise.**
- **The subject matter may not be so easy to understand to everybody.**
- **Students still depend on the tutor to understand the module.**
- **The volume of course content is greater than the allocated credit hours.**
- **Some of the charts, tables, diagrams and questions are inadequately designed.**
- **There are spelling mistakes in the materials.**
- **There is overlap or repetition between some courses in the same programme.**
- **The language used is not always clear.**
- **Some concepts and content are not complete.**
- **The style and methodology are not fully self-instructional.**

In some programme such as MEd, Selina Akhter (2004) also could identify partially self instructional module indicating the the improper development of the course material which should be taken into account to solve. Because, the philosophy of ODL is that materials should be fully self instructional to mitigate the isolation of the learners from the tutors and the institution.

As Holmberg (1983) notes, the text should incorporate certain key instructional devices facilitating the students internal didactic conversation i.e. to talk to themselves about the subject matter and ideas they encounter in the text.

The conclusion so far, however, is that the different types of instructional material, including print, audio-visual, tutorial services, practical classes, field work, assessment that are all part of the ODL matrix are still not up to the mark for providing sustainable quality education for the increasingly large number of students.

For example, few video cassettes are actually provided with course materials. They are mainly used for broadcasting. In a study a number of recommendations were made by Alam and Chowdhury (2004) that the regional centres (RCs) and coordinating offices (COs) might be provided with modern interactive technologies such as radio- and tele-counseling, voice mail, email, fax and internet-based learning.

They also emphasized the need to improve library support and field-based practical classes.

Coordinators and tutors should be trained at regular intervals to update their knowledge and skills for ODL. In response, Bazlur Rashid (2005) notes the use of participatory workshops to examine the constraints on and mechanisms for strengthening and ensuring sustainable and high quality delivery of ODL. Systemic and regular processes of monitoring may also be used to maintain the administrative as well as pedagogic quality and instructional effectiveness.

In a study on the use of delivery system it has been reported that 100% students had their access to modules and tutorial classes, 65% TV programmes, 78% radio programmes, 42% used telephone, 10% personal computer and 5% used audio cassettes and video tapes (Fig. 6).

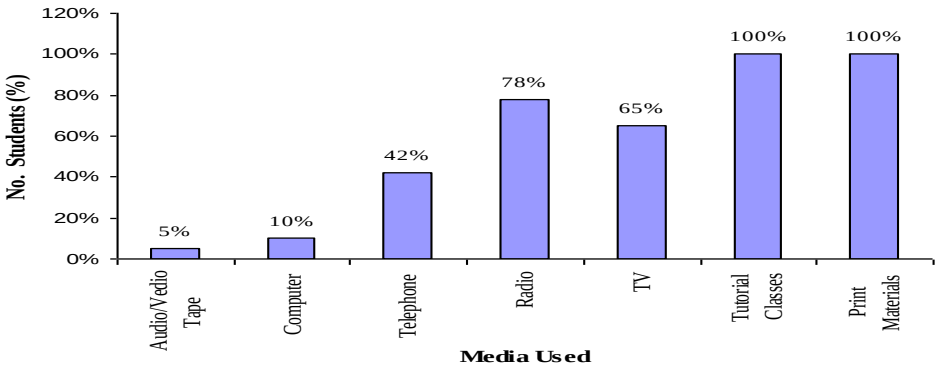

Figure: 6
Access of students to different media in PGDM programme of BOU
(Source: Mayenul Islam and Azad Kamal, 2004)

Of all the media used by BOU, along with the print media Radio and TV are probably the most important and have the great potential for educational exposure at the mass level. TV is a more natural way than print-based or audio-based instruction to reach students. Mass viewers can also be attracted easily in a short period. There are however ambiguous messages. For example, it has been reported that only 80% of students were satisfied with BOU's TV programmes. The teaching-learning of ODL of BOU may be briefly appended below.

Table: 3 Appendix of ODL at BOU

Component	Student Response	Approximate study time
1. Printed materials a. Printed texts b. Set books c. Recommended reading Materials	Systematic reading	55%-70%
2. Audio-Video Devices a. Course broadcast on Radio b. Course broadcast on T.V c. Audio-Video cassettes d. Broadcast notes	Viewing and listening	5%-7%
3. Demonstration and Practical work	Observing and doing practical work	10%-15%
4. Tuition and counseling a. Individual and Group tuition b. Individual and Group Counseling c. Tutorial session at TC's	Contact with tutor and counselor at BOU HQ, Gazipur or CC offices at district level	
5. Assignment and Assessment a. Self Assessment by SAQ b. Tutor marked assignment (TMA) c. Semester Examinations	Doing practical work or project as decided by schools; doing written assignment; taking examinations	5%-15%

(Source: Sirajul Islam, 2005)

The tangible constraints lie in the science subjects, especially the courses with practical. So, the programmes such as B.Ag.Ed, CLP, CPFP, B.Sc. in Nursing, DCSA. etc. Theory tutoring are concomitantly followed by practical classes by direct supervision of the teachers/tutors in the respective tutorial centers as well as convenient research stations.With respect to future delivery, and teaching and learning, the internet has great potential. However, although the internet was first introduced in Bangladesh in 1993, until now it has not been being possible to use it for ODL in BOU because there is no countrywide network.

Nevertheless, BOU has already developed a well-equipped and modern media centre capable of making high quality audio-video programmes and that could in the future be used for online courses (Mizanoor Rahman and Monira Hossain, 2003).

Examination

The current examination system is based on conventional methods. The students' performance, evaluation or examination, standard of academic system etc. are followed in almost all the programmes. The examination standards are upheld through the use of external invigilators such relevant teachers from other organizations, magistrates from administration for controlling any unfair means/undesirable happenings etc. and examiners for the scripts as well as for the practical examinations. Course work is assessed through Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA), which are carried out at home and marked by tutors. Learners are usually assigned to go through selected case-study/topics and to write it about them as an assignment to be submitted at the end of the semester. TMAs enable learners to assess their own progress. However, in addition to that an up to date online system of evaluation for assignments, practical notes etc. should be enhanced to ensure performance standards. The total marks obtained are converted into a grade point average (GPA). This is the evaluation system used at present throughout all the public universities in Bangladesh, including BOU (Table: 4). It may be mentioned that the grading system is approved by the UGC as well as the BOU authority.

Table: 4 Grading scale used to evaluate students' performance

Numerical Grade	Letter Grade	Grade Point
80% or above	A^+ (A plus)	4.0
75% to less than 80%	A (A regular)	3.75
70% to less than 75%	A^- (A minus)	3.5
65% to less than 70%	B^+ (B plus)	3.25
60% to less than 65%	B (B regular)	3.0
55% to less than 60%	B^- (B minus)	2.75
50% to less than 55%	C^+ (C plus)	2.5
45% to less than 50%	C (C regular)	2.25
40% to less than 45%	C^- (C minus)	2.0
<40%	F (Fail)	0.0

$$\text{GPA} = \frac{\sum(\text{Credit of the course passed} \times \text{grade point earned})}{\sum \text{Credit of all course attended}}$$

Non-formal programmes

Non-formal education has been given emphasis and has been prompted by the 1990 International Conference on Education for All at which world leaders made a commitment to provide education as the basic right of every individual. In Bangladesh, the Bureau of Non-formal Education was established in March 2005, based on the role of non-formal education programmes in income generating activities and poverty alleviation (Mia and Mian, 2004).The formal academic programmes launched by different schools in BOU are thus followed by non-formal programmes, linked by their relevance and compatibility to the formal programmes. The non-formal programmes consist of literacy, numeracy, and life skills such as decision making, problem solving, critical thinking and effective communication, enabling individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges in everyday life. Life skills enable people to continue learning and adapting their vocational expertise, particularly important for the challenges of poverty alleviation and wealth creation. Thus, in principle, non-formal education can help people, even in remote rural areas, adapt and contribute to the demands of social and economic change in Bangladesh and to building a more egalitarian society, accommodate diversity and promote participation in nation-building.

It may be conceded that the teaching-learning system for both formal and non-formal programmes is still inadequate to the actual requirements. Only a selected number of audio-video programmes have been being recorded in the media centre of BOU and broadcasted through single channel BTV in the schedule but insufficiently. It may be mentioned that BOU deserves and expect in near future a separate television channel only for launching the programmes of BOU.

CONCLUSION

Since its inception in 1992, BOU, as a relatively small institution with a large network, has been able to demonstrate that ODL is a real alternative for educating the ever increasing population of the country. This view has now been incorporated into the educational policies and plans of the Government. BOU fills the gaps and meets the needs that other institutions are unable to meet. ODL has become a part and parcel of national policy to combat illiteracy, poverty reduction and to expand education on a mass scale in the shortest possible time. Apart from the limitations, with the rapid development of ICTs and changing global perspectives, ODL has become accepted and is seen as indispensable to mainstream education in Bangladesh. Therefore, policy and decision makers now need to promote further action to ensure the quality and sustainability of ODL, and to overcome the current challenges.

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