

Use of Media in Open and Distance Learning: A Study of Their Use at Bangladesh Open University.

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ABSTRACT

Media are important factors in distance and open education. In distance and open learning systems different types of media are used to transmit education to the learners. Open learning systems would make the best use of new communication technologies. Besides technological advancements, developments in behavioural as well as social sciences have also contributed towards improved communication systems in educational settings. Modern distance education courses usually have a print component-learner guide, study guide or outline and notes provided either in print or on a diskette. The main source of lecture materials may be TV or radio broadcasts, audio or videotape, audio, audiographic, or videoconferences, computer assisted learning of some form, or computer mediated communications. Several media such as print material, tutorial classes, radio and TV broadcasts are used in open learning situations in the Bangladesh Open University. This paper intends to reveal the effective use of media i.e. print material, tutorial classes, radio and TV programmes in distance and open learning systems. The information is the basis of a survey conducted with the students of the Graduate Diploma in Management (GDM) programme of the School of Business of Bangladesh Open University (BOU). This also suggests remedial measures to be undertaken to make direct human contact, counselling, print materials, radio and TV programmes more effective for the BOU students

INTRODUCTION

The Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is the only distance and open learning public university of this country. The BOU has opened up a new vista in distance education in the country. It was established in 1992 under the Act No. 38 of the Bangladesh Parliament. Its objectives are to:

Expand all levels of education, knowledge and science by a diversity of means, including the use of any communication technology to improve the quality of education and to provide opportunities for education to the general public through mass-orientation of education and to create efficient manpower by improving the quality of education in general (Bangladesh Gazette-1992).

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This is indicative of three- fold objectives viz. (1) the improvement of the quality of education, (2) the provision of educational opportunities to a wide range of citizens and (3) improving the competence level of the workforce. The prime objective of BOU is to transform the country's vast human resources into an educated and trained workforce by extending to them a wide range of academic programmes both formal and non-formal. BOU's programmes are aimed at all levels of learners, particularly working people and women and the socially disadvantaged groups, who cannot enroll in traditional universities.

BOU has six schools: science and technology, education, social science, agriculture and business. Consequently BOU has already launched 18 formal and 19 non-formal programmes. Formal programmes include masters degree, bachelors degree, diploma and certificate programmes for distance and open learners. Over 2,50,000 (approximately) students have already been enrolled in various programmes. Non- formal programmes are designed to help people live better lives.

The role of media in distance education is of fundamental importance. A medium is a generic form of communication associated with particular ways of presenting knowledge. There are five important media in education: (1) direct human contract (face – to – face), (2) text (including still graphics), (3) audio, (4) television and (5) computers. The use of each media gives both variety and the chance to accommodate different learning styles (Rumble, 1994). Among all the available electronic media, Radio and the Television appear to be the most common and popular for distant students to learn from and for educators to impart knowledge from a distance. In spite of advanced communication technologies which are more glamorous and efficient, the radio is capable of generating the students' own complete and thoroughly satisfying imaginative images (Jones, 1962). Merdian (1979) finds that the radio is able to stimulate and make use of the students' imagination to a great extent. With the advancements in communication technology, a variety of audio-visual media, radio television broadcast, video cassettes, video compact disk, video text and computer - have become part of the study package in distance and open learning system.

Kachroo (1999) also reported that the Institute of Correspondence Education, University of Jammu as well as Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) supported students' learning through counselling and mass media namely radio, TV and newspapers. Besides a lot of research has

been conducted on various media of instruction used in open and distance learning. For example, Ding (1994), Nipper (1989), Kaufman (1989), Siddiqui, (1987), Rumble (1994), Jamison and McAnany (1978), McAnany and Mayo (1980), Singh (1999). The outcome of these works prescribes the use of direct human contact, text materials, audio-video cassettes, television and radio programmes and computing as useful media for open and distance learning.

In open and distance education systems, print materials, tutorial sessions, radio, television, audio and video-cassettes, CD and other innovative techniques are used for effective transmission of knowledge to learners at a distance. Since on-campus teaching requires a huge infrastructural development, developing countries like Bangladesh with very limited resources have no alternative but to implement off-campus education to educate their vast population. But to ensure the quality of education, the distance education institutions must be careful about the use of proper media. An effective combination of print and electronic media is necessary for assuring effectiveness of the distance education system. BOU uses print, television, radio, audio- cassettes and face-to-face tutorials for students. It has not adopted computing media and technologies for teaching due to obvious reasons of cost and poor access (The Guardian; 1995). The present study has been conducted to ensure the effective use of these media in open and distance learning.

2. The Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To assure effective use of media at open and distance learning.
2. To suggest remedial measures to be undertaken to make direct human contact, counselling, print materials, radio and TV programmes more effective for BOU students

3. Methodology

The survey was conducted on a sample of the students of the Post graduate Diploma in Management (GDM) programme of BOU. Out of 7000 students registered to-date through different Regional Resource Centres (RRCs) of BOU at Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Jessore, a sample of 200 students was used. A structured questionnaire was sent to these subjects to collect

the data. However, only 120 questionnaires were received. Simple descriptive statistical techniques were used for the analysis of the data.

4. Results and Discussion

Student profile

According to the database information, the distribution of the sample of students was done according to different characteristics. The profile of the students is given in Table-I.

Table-I: Student Profile

Sex		Age		Profession	
Male	76.25%	20-30 Years	46.25%	Non-government service	48.35 %
Female	23.75%	30-40 Years	37.00%	Regular students	21.25 %
		40+ Years	16.75%	Government service	20.50 %
				Defense	6.25 %
				Other occupation	3.65 %

The proportion of male and female students of the GDM programme was 76.25 percent and 23.75 percent respectively, but their distribution according to age differed significantly. The majority of GDM students were below 30 years of age. The young age of GDM students suggests that they are mostly young persons in the early stages of their careers, interested in improving their skills in business or management. The nature of this programme and its rate of enrolment suggest that this programme has been successful in proving the growing interest in BOU programmes. While a large portion (48.35 percent) of students are from non government institutions, 20.50 percent are those in government service, 6.25 percent are from defense and 21.25 percent are regular students and 3.65 percent are from other occupations.

The majority of the students are interested in the GDM programme because it is a professional programme and has generated interest among the private and public sector employees. Most of the students of the GDM programme have selected the distance and open education system because of its flexibility which helps them to continue their studies while being employed.

Direct Human Contact (tutorial session)

The opinion of the students about their tutorial classes and percentage of the attendance in the same is shown in Table-II.

Table-II: Student Perceptions on Attendance in Tutorial Classes (%)

Students were satisfied with their tutorial classes	100%
Students attending tutorial classes	40%
Students not attending tutorial classes	60%

100 percent of the students were optimistic about their tutorial classes. But 60 percent of them could not attend due to their business activities. They requested that at least 12 such classes be held for each course offered in a semester.

Though print-material is the main medium of instruction, students constantly request that more tutorial classes be conducted. Students are yet to accept the core concept of distance learning. Often they are more dependent on the tutor than on self-learning. They seem to think that teachers/tutors will teach them every thing as in on-campus teaching. However apart from this; tutorial classes have immense importance. This is the only two-way communication provided by BOU. The printed materials are produced with sufficient supporting explanations and examples where necessary; yet students have a great need for tutorial classes to discuss courses like Mathematics, Financial Accounting, Managerial Accounting, Financial Management etc. which have a technical bias.

Counselling

The opinion of the students about Counselling by the school faculties and the by RRCs officials is shown in Table-III.

Table-III: Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction with the Counselling

Satisfied with counselling by the school faculties	80%
Dissatisfied with counselling by the school faculties	20%
Satisfied with counselling by the RRCs officials	40%
Dissatisfied with counselling by the RRCs officials	60%

Counselling is a very effective medium, which is very popular among the students. It is a two-way process between a counselor and a learner. Either the counselor or the learner can initiate it. Counselling is often offered by the BOU through face-to-face conversation, telephone, letters, and handouts (Regional Resource Centre (RRC) handbook), Dean's open letter, and the admission brochure to some extent. Present and prospective students often visit RRCs and the campus of the BOU with a lot of questions and officials of the RRC and faculties in the school frequently counsel them.

Forty percent of the students were satisfied with the counselling conducted by RRCs officials. But 80 percent of students were satisfied with Counselling by school faculties. They also have demanded that BOU introduce teleconferencing and video conferencing services.

In a technically advanced society with a reliable and accessible telephone system counselling through teleconferencing, answer-phones, audio video cassettes, broadcasting by computer or interactive video disc can be emphasized. However, in a developing country like Bangladesh the most important counselling would be correspondence letter and handbook. Yet, in any situation students feel comfortable with face to face and telephone counselling which are provided by the BOU for their present and potential students.

Print Media

Print media is powerful and effective for open and distance learners. Every learner is acquainted with text books as potential print based study material. It can easily present words, numbers, musical notations, two-dimensional pictures and diagrams. Besides tutorial sessions the study package provided by BOU for distance learners includes printed texts. As the core medium, it is essential that students be able to obtain the printed course materials. Printed materials for each course are delivered through 12 regional resource

centres and 80 local centres of Bangladesh Open University from where students can collect them when they register for their courses. The print materials are developed by a course development team. Writers, editors, style editors, instructional designers, graphic designers and course coordinators are members of the team.

All the students had access to the printed materials. On the whole, they felt that the quality of the materials was good. The student satisfaction questionnaire indicates that students were generally very pleased with the quality of their printed materials. They commented that the syllabus for some of the courses was very wide, and it should be reduced. They commented that the quality of printing and binding was low.

Open learning materials are self-study materials. Teaching a learner through self-instructional texts is different from other methods of teaching. Keeping this in mind the BOU has developed the course materials to help the individual learners, find easy access to their core subjects and other related subject areas. It also aims at explaining the subject matter in such a way that the text can substitute the teacher / tutor. Emphasis is laid on exercises and activities that will help the students have an in-depth understanding of the subject matter rather than merely read it. The texts also make references to other reliable sources of information available. The relevant references include textbooks, audio-video programmes, and so on. Thus the BOU aims at preparing the text in such a way that it will substitute the tutor and make learning effective and interesting.

Radio Broadcast

Radio is the most popular and inexpensive medium of mass communication all over the world. In the context of developing countries like Bangladesh use of radio is very common among the masses. Radio transmission can cover a vast area across geographical barriers. Radio Bangladesh medium wave transmission reaches most areas of the country. In fact the radio coverage in Bangladesh is around 100 percent. The general economic status of GDM students of the Business School also ensures that almost all the students have access to radio. Research findings show that 86.25 percent of GDM students listen to radio programmes of BOU and 50 percent of them find it effective and helpful in their pursuit of studies. Around 13.75% percent of them could not listen to BOU's radio programmes regularly. 81 percent reported that the radio programmes are easy to

understand. The opinion of the students about the radio programmes is shown in Table-IV.

Table-IV: The opinion of the students about the radio programmes

Students listen to radio programmes	86.25%
Students could not listen to radio programmes	13.75%
Radio programmes effective and helpful	50%
Easy to understand	81%

Students' preference for radio transmission, by day of the week and time is shown in Table-V.

Table-V: Students' preference for day and time of the radio programmes broadcasts

Day of Week		Time	
Thursday	22%	2.00- 4.00pm	04%
Friday	71%	4.00-6.00pm	11%
Saturday	7%	6.00-8.00pm	65%
		8.00-10.00pm	20%

School of Business broadcasts radio programmes for GDM students on Sunday between 6.00-8.00 pm. However, 71 percent of the students prefer radio programmes to be broadcast on Fridays and 65 percent opined that broadcast time should be between 6.00 to 8.00 pm.

Radio can be used to relay lectures, provide discussions on relevant sections of the course materials, give students access to alternative views, provide material for analysis (e.g. children's speech patterns), give access to performance, provide rural experiences, and collect and relay to others the views and experiences of specialists, experts, and witnesses. Because it is very cheap, it can provide a channel for messages to be sent to students, and provide a way for giving instant feedback to students. One major drawback is the difficulty of enabling two-way communication to take place, though it

can be used in conjunction with the telephone or letters. Its other major drawback is its ephemeral nature.

BOU is engaged in planning, producing and evaluating both radio broadcasts and audio- cassettes for its students. From the very beginning, audio tapes and radio broadcasts have formed part of the BOU course materials.

Television

As per our findings 71.25 percent of the GDM students had access to TV programmes of BOU. Eighty five percent of the students appreciated TV broadcasting by the BOU. They believed that the programmes are suitable for GDM students and for others in terms of content. The opinion of the students about the TV programmes is shown in Table-VI.

BOU transmits TV programmes of 40 minutes duration six days a week between 4.00pm to 6.00pm and 30 minutes of radio broadcasts are carried out daily between 7.00pm to 8.00pm. All the schools of the BOU share these time schedules. Hence, on average each school has one day per week for its BTV programme. To compensate for low quality tutorial support in areas outside the big cities (where the quality of local tutorial support is difficult to maintain) as well as to ensure a consistent standard of support across the country, each school of the university carefully selects the contents of the radio and TV programme.

Table-VI: The opinion of the students about the TV programmes

Students had access to TV programmes	71.25%
Students did not have access to TV programmes	28.75%
Students appreciated TV broadcasting by the BOU	85%
Students did not appreciate TV broadcasting by the BOU	15%

Students' preference for TV transmission, by day of the week and time is shown in Table-VII.

Table-VII: Students' preference for day and time of the TV programme broadcasts

Day of Week		Time	
Thursday	25%	3.00- 5.00pm	08%
Friday	67%	5.00-7.00pm	12%
Saturday	8%	7.00-9.00pm	66%
		9.00-11.00pm	14%

The School of Business broadcasts TV programmes for GDM students every Tuesday between 3.30 and 5.00pm. However, 67 percent of the students preferred Friday as the day of broadcasting and 66 percent preferred 7.00 to 9.00pm as the ideal time of broadcasting.

One of the main objectives of establishing BOU is to provide various sections of the population with a wider access to higher education. To achieve this objective, BOU has adopted a teaching-learning system based on a combination of print and non-print media. As one of the non-print media BOU aims to advance and disseminate knowledge by television broadcast.

Television is a complex medium. It can personalize the teaching, enabling the distant student to identify the individuality of the teacher(s) responsible for the materials, and provide a public image of the university's presence in the community. As such it also plays an important role in recruiting students. Although that regularly scheduled broadcast would motivate students to keep up with the pace of their studies, this is almost certainly not the case. This pacing function is far more likely to be achieved through regular assessment. While television can be a powerful educational tool, its value is totally dependent on the quality of materials and the skill with which it is used. Moreover television is essentially a one-way communication medium and as such it does not provide for immediate feed back on learners' reactions, queries and doubts. Sometimes the absence of active participation and lack of provision for feedback are likely to fail to sustain the interest and enthusiasm of learners. However, the real strengths of television are its unique teaching features and its ability to improve learning efficiency.

Rumble (1994) reported that at the time BOU was planned, the percentage of population with access to television was very low in Bangladesh (0.5 per 100 people in 1990 against 5.5 per 100 people in all developing countries,

and 54.4 per 100 in industrialized countries). Not surprisingly, there were concerns about the use of broadcasting technologies where ownership of receivers is so low. Bangladesh Television (BTV), the government owned network, broadcasts on a single channel which currently covers about 85% of the total population via its original station in Dhaka, and nine relay stations. Some areas of the country notably the Chittagong Hill Tracts are currently not covered.

5. Recommendations

Since the distance learners cannot have much face to face contact with teachers like the on-campus students, sitting with only print materials may be boring to them. Good quality radio and TV programmes, which are instructive and interesting, may relieve them of that boredom. To ensure the effective uses of media the authorities of BOU should pay significant attention to the following:

- The tutorial service should be enhanced. The number of classes should not be less than twelve per course.
- The size of the text materials should not be too wide and the rationale for the syllabus should be the ability to complete it within a semester by the distant learners.
- The quality of printing and binding of the text materials should be improved.
- The time span for broadcasting of radio programmes should be extended. The same topic should be broadcast on two consecutive days. It would be very helpful and convenient for the students if the programmes are broadcast within 6.00-8.00 pm on Fridays. The broadcasting should be regular and at the end of the broadcast the topic to be taken up for next day broadcasting should be announced.
- With regard to TV programmes, the quality of presentation should be ensured. Presentation must be attractive. To avoid monotony more visuals/outdoor shots should be incorporated in video programmes. Discussion should be on the critical and difficult topics of each course. If the discussions could be arranged in the form of classroom interaction, they would benefit the students more. Continuous talk by a single presenter may make the whole programme boring to the students. It would be very helpful for the

students if the programmes are broadcast at 7.00-9.00 pm on Fridays so that the students can watch the TV programmes.

- The teachers of the concerned school should come forward to design and direct the radio and TV programmes.
- Repetition of a single programme several times in the same semester should be avoided.
- Time allocated for the TV broadcast should be enhanced. For that the BOU can arrange to get satellite access and a separate channel should be opened to broadcast its programmes. This will reduce its dependency on the government owned channel.
- The radio and TV programmes may be supplemented by audio and video-cassettes provided to the students.

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