STAY HERE, GO FURTHER:
The Status of Open and Distance Education in Bangladesh Open University (BOU) in comparison to two other South Asian Countries

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ABSTRACT

Distance education has emerged out of social compulsion, the dynamics of change and new cultures. It was the failure of traditional systems to be able to meet the demand in countries, where the resources available for tertiary education are limited, which basically gave birth to the new trend of education known as open and distance education. This new and innovative system of education has received a high level of acceptance in different countries as it offers flexible educational opportunities for continuing education to a large segment of their population. The increasing number of older adult learners with varying lifestyles in the population, increasing competitiveness of getting places in tertiary institutions, higher cost of education and a shortage of teachers are the main factors for increasing the popularity of distance education (Duncan, *et al.*, 2003). Bangladesh has also taken the opportunity to provide a uniform and mass oriented universal system of education through open and distance education establishing Bangladesh Open University (BOU) in 1992.

Objectives of the Study: The main objectives of this study are-

- **to assess the overall status of BOU in comparison with the open universities of two neighboring South Asian countries considering the following aspects:**
  - **Administrative structural functions,**
  - **Courses and instructional strategies,**
  - **Learning opportunities, and**
  - **Library, laboratory and counselling facilities**
- **to explore the potential of improvement for BOU to enable it to meet the challenges of the country's educational needs in the next millennium.**

Keywords: BOU; ICT based teaching; ODL.

INTRODUCTION

Distance education has emerged out of social compulsion, the dynamics of change and new cultures. It was the failure of traditional systems to be able to meet the demand in countries, where the resources available for tertiary education are limited, which basically gave birth to the new trend of education known as open and distance education. This new and innovative system of education has received a high level of acceptance in different countries as it offers flexible educational opportunities for continuing education to a large segment of their population. The increasing number of older adult learners with varying lifestyles in the population, increasing competitiveness of getting places in tertiary institutions, higher cost of education and a

shortage of teachers are the main factors for increasing the popularity of distance education (Duncan, *et al.*, 2003).

Bangladesh has also taken the opportunity to provide a uniform and mass oriented universal system of education through open and distance education establishing Bangladesh Open University (BOU) in 1992.

The strategic vision of BOU was to increase the knowledge and skills of the workforce by improving the education system for people, who drop out of the conventional educational system. BOU provides the opportunity for further education of the disadvantaged population to accomplish their eagerness of learning and strengthen their potential through distance education. The ultimate goal of BOU is to enhance human resource development, upgrade skills and gradually uplift the standard of national education performance.

As only one of the public universities in Bangladesh to use distance education as a method of delivery, BOU is mandated to-promote through multimedia instruction of every standard and knowledge - both general and scientific - by means of any form of communications technology, to raise the standard of education and to give the people educational opportunities by democratizing education and creating a class of competent people by raising the standard of education of the people generally (Clause 5, BOU Act, 1992).

During the last few decades, Distance Education (DE) has progressed very rapidly in the developed and some developing countries (e.g. UK, Turkey, Thailand, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). The open universities of these countries provide academic and instructional supports to the learners with the means of being able to communicate through voice, video and data, in real time, with tutors using modern ICTs and participating in face-to-face tutorial sessions. BOU has also pursued its goals over the last two decades using print materials, television, radio, audiocassettes and occasional face-to-face tuition sessions (Islam *et al.,* 2004). BOU teaching materials are positively regarded by learners, who stated that the materials are good for self-study (Rumble, 1995; Ali et al., 1997). Additionally, in order to ensure high quality education, BOU provides advanced training on different aspects of distance and open learning at home and abroad for its academic and administrative staffs. This initiative enabled BOU to launch and successfully run a huge number of formal and non-formal programmes within a decade of its establishment and to maintain the quality of these programmes (Islam, *et al.*, 2006). However, compared to the situation of ODL globally, BOU is still far behind in adopting modern technologies to teach their distance learners. Due to economic and infrastructural constraints, it still cannot offer ICT based teaching facilities for its learners and it only uses four strategies (for example, print materials, audio-video cassettes, radio and TV programmes) to deliver education for distance learners (Rumble, 1995). Therefore, this article has taken the opportunity to assess the status of BOU and to identify the areas of improvement through a comparison with the open universities of India and Sri Lanka. It is anticipated that this might have policy implications for making BOU more effective for its learners.

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- to explore the potential of improvement for BOU to enable it to meet the challenges of the country's educational needs in the next millennium.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

This study is more descriptive in nature and used documentary and secondary data as a tool of analysis. Information about the universities examined in this study was generated from various sources including university documents, the literature of open and distance learning of the relevant universities and websites. Documentary and secondary data analysis was preferred here as it offers a number of benefits over data collected from primary sources. It is cost and time effective as secondary information offers easy access to good quality data for a fraction of the resources involved in carrying out a data collection exercise by the researchers (Bryman, 2002:202). The criteria, such as credibility, criteria-authenticity and meaning of the information prescribed by Scott (1990) were kept in mind, while using documents and secondary sources of information in this study. It is worthwhile to mention that only two open universities of neighboring South Asian countries, that is, the Open University of India (IGNOU) and Sri Lanka (OUSL) were selected for this study.

Analysis of Findings

The success of ODL largely depends on the support and opportunities offered by the organisation for its learners, where the extent of support services largely depends on the particular institution's capacity and availability of resources (Usun, 2004).

Accordingly, the status of BOU will be discussed on the basis of the following two aspects:

- Administrative structure and functions, such as: arrangement and number of RC/RRC, LC and TC/SC; number of Schools and Faculties and the courses they are offering, management of the examination system and evaluation of students performance.
- Academic-related supports (i.e. learner support services) including such packages as instructional processes, library and laboratory facilities and counselling services.

Academic structure and Functions of the Open Universities

The structure and functions of ODL are different from those of conventional education systems as they do not have a direct teaching-learning environment. In general, ODL is delivered from the institution's headquarters with the administrative and teaching support of RC/RRC, LC and TC/SC. The faculties are responsible for planning, designing and writing the educational materials for their students.

The universities continue to register students; arrange examinations; prepare and produce printed materials, visual and audio course materials and to dispatch them to students with the help of different divisions (i.e. DPD, computer division etc.), regional centres, local centres and tutorial or student centres.

Functional Structure of the Open Universities

The comparative academic structural functions of the three open universities in the sample of the current study: BOU, OUSL and IGNOU, are presented in Figure 1.

The Indira Ghandi National Open University (INGOU) serves both as an autonomous institution and a co-operative body, where it has co-ordinating and funding responsibilities for other Indian Open Universities and distance education institutes within India and in partnership with 36 countries.

INGOU delivers education through the network of RC's, sub-RCs, SC's/TC's for its students, who are living in far flung areas of the country. Additionally, it offers courses internationally through the network of 60 overseas regional centres located in 36 countries (IGNOU Profile, 2010). A different picture can be found for BOU and OUSL.Both of them serve as autonomous institutions and the central offices deliver education with the co-operation of RCs, LCs and TCs/SCs. It is important to note that LCs can be found in BOU only. Three different organisational structures are depicted in Figure 1, which the selected universities follow for transferring education as per their educational requirements through ODL system. These include:

- **Three-Tier Organisational Structure: This structure comprises the central office, regional centres and tutorial/study centres. BOU, IGNOU and OUSL have this type of organisation.**
- **Four-Tier Organisational Structure: This structure comprises the central office, regional centres, local centres and tutorial centres. In some cases, BOU follows this structure**
- **Five-Tier Organisational Structure: This structure comprises the central office, RCs, sub-RCs, partnership overseas RCs and SCs, which exists only in IGNOU.**

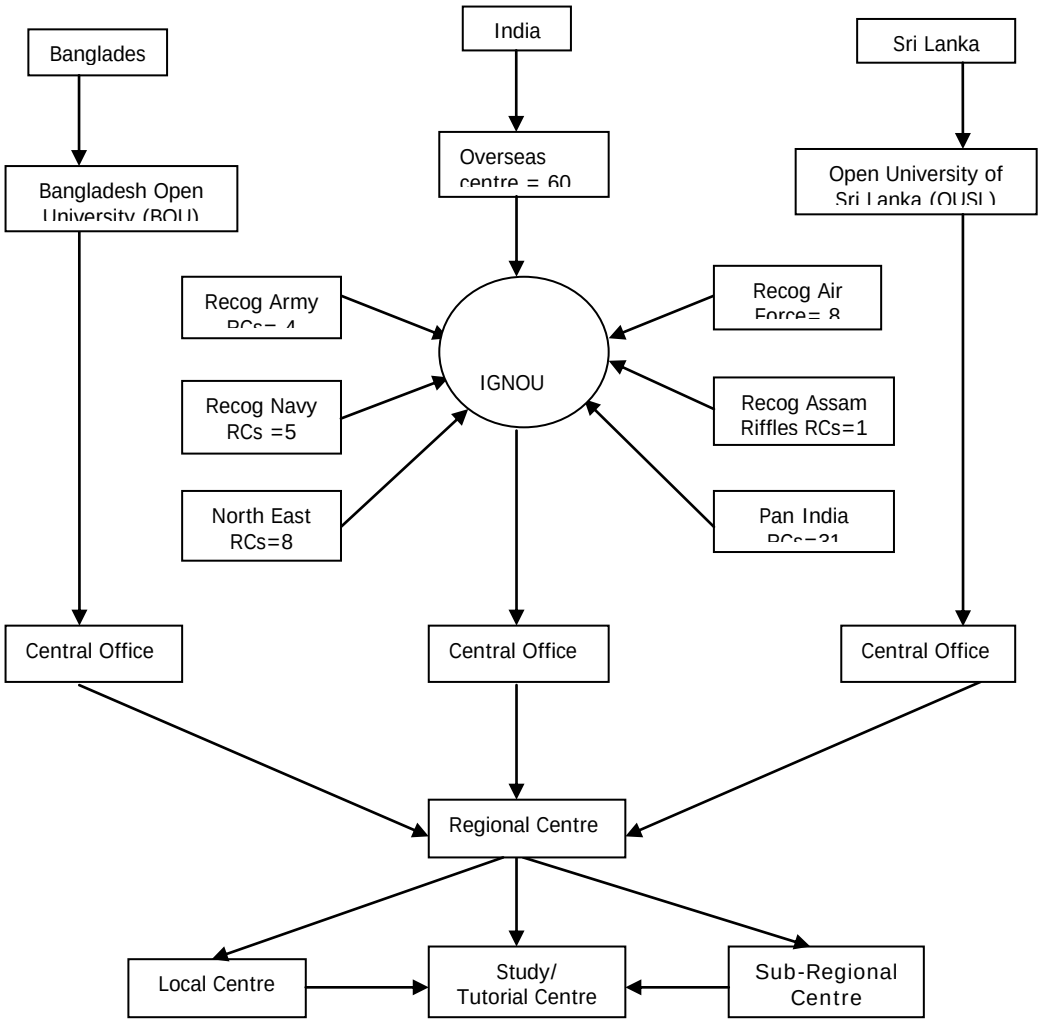

Figure: 1
Academic structure of BOU, OUSL and IGNOU

Number of Schools and Faculties

The main responsibilities of school/faculties are to offer different courses for distance learners. The schools/faculties are responsible for designing the content of course materials. Additionally, they are responsible for

- **media production and broadcast from Open University Radio and TV studios and**
- **the arrangement of academic counselling and examinations.**

As shown from Table: 1, Bangladesh Open University offers two different types of programmes, i.e. formal and non-formal under the supervision of six different schools.

BOU has already launched 21 formal programmes, which consist of certificate, diploma, under-graduate and post-graduate levels of education offering more than 300 courses (Banglapedia website). In addition to formal programme, BOU also offers 19 non-formal programmes in the areas of primary health care, nutrition, agriculture, poultry, livestock, energy, and environment (Islam and Rahman, 1997; Islam et al. 2004).

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) offers certificate, diploma, under-graduate and post-graduate programmes under the supervision of four faculties/schools. OUSL offers a total of 100 courses (Education Technology, OUSL website, 2008). Compared to BOU and OUSL, a greater range and diversity of courses are found in IGNOU, which runs 338 academic programmes comprising 1300 courses at certificate, diploma, under-graduate, post-graduate and even doctoral levels of education under 21 schools. Further, a number of non-accredited extension and skills-oriented programmes are also offered by these schools. An important feature of IGNOU's course materials is their wide acceptability, authenticity and up-to-date contents. This strengthens IGNOU's operations in 36 countries (for example, Singapore, Ethiopia, Nepal, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Omar, Kuwait, Afghanistan and Sharjah and so on). The Commonwealth of Learning (CoL) has recognised it as one of its centres of excellence. IGNOU also has the unique privilege of hosting the Secretariats of SAARC Consortium of Open Distance Learning (SACODiL) approved by Heads of Government of SAARC Nations and Global Mega Universities Network (GMUNET) initially promoted by UNESC

Management of Examination System of ODL System

The examination procedure of open and distance education is relatively different from the conventional education system. In ODL system, in fact, the central office, regional centres, tutorial or study centers take responsibility for managing and operating examinations.

As shown in Table: 2, the management and examination procedure is more centralised in BOU, where regional offices and tutorial offices are not involved fully in the examination procedure. The central office manages all the formalities of examinations, whilst the role of regional resource centres (RRCs), local centres (LCs) and tutorial centres (TCs) is to follow the head office's instructions.

A different scenario can be found in IGNOU and OUSL. In the case of IGNOU, regional offices organise all the examination procedure within their regions and for OUSL, the regional offices follow the similar procedure as that of IGNOU with the help of study centres.

Table: 2
Management of Examination System

BOU	IGNOU	OUSL
Organised by central office with the help of RRC and TC	Organised by RC	Organised by RC with the help of SC

Apart from examinations, as part of academic evaluation, all of the three universities arrange additional assessment activities. For example, IGNOU arranges summer & winter schools as shown in Table: 3. Importantly, BOU used this concept for its Bachelor of Education (B Ed) programme managed by School of Education (SoE) up to 2008. SoE has introduced the same curriculum offered by conventional mode for its distance B.Ed programme from 2009.

In new B.Ed curriculum, SoE dedicates half of total tutorial classes (i.e. eight out of 16 classes) for teaching practice. During this time students practice their teaching learning activities in the affiliated tutorial centres under the guidance of subject tutors. Field work and laboratory work are the significant aspects of the OUSL and IGNOU teaching learning activities. IGNOU provides full laboratory facilities for its science students under the supervision of RCs. The science students of OUSL also have access to laboratory classes in their central office, which is limited to three months periods of time.
BOU has provision of small scale field work only for geography course of BA/BSS programme and it provides science and computer laboratory facilities for the students through the negotiation of the concern tutorial centers. BOU can adopt the similar strategy of IGNOU and OUSL for the students offering laboratory facilities in the central office, regional or local centers of BOU. Certainly this initiative can improve the quality of education and BOU can offer more technology based courses for the students.

Table: 3
Additional Assessment Activities of BOU, IGNOU and OUSL

BOU	IGNOU	OUSL
• Teaching practice • Laboratory work • Field work	• Summer and winter schools • Laboratory work • Field work	• Laboratory work

Evaluation System

In assessing the students' academic performance, BOU, OUSL and IGNOU follow similar systems. The evaluation frameworks in BOU, OUSL and IGNOU are mainly a combination of assignments and examinations as summarised in Table 4. Provision of project work can be found in BOU, OUSL and IGNOU at graduate and post graduate levels.

Table 4
Evaluation System for Student Assessment

BOU	IGNOU	OUSL

• Self evaluation or reflected evaluation • Internal assessment	• Self evaluation or reflected evaluation	• Continuous assessment by means of

or formative evaluation by means of assignment / TMA. • Project work • Term end evaluation or summative evaluation.	• Internal assessment or formative evaluation by means of assignment * • Project work **. • Term end evaluation or summative evaluation.	assignment and assessment test. • Project work • Final examination

*** Assignment: (i) Tutorial Marked Assignment (TMAS);**
(ii) Computer Marked Assignment (CMAS)
**** Only for diploma courses and practical work for science students**

BOU, OUSL and IGNOU use similar techniques for distribution of marks. The overall students' performance is published combining the students' obtained result in final examinations and assignments as shown in Table 5.

The findings reveal that 20% of the marks are allocated for assignment work in BOU, whilst in OUSL and IGNOU assignments account for 30% of the total marks. Most assignments given by BOU are essays on a set topic but OUSL and IGNOU also use multiple-choice questions and short open questions (Zhabg *et al.*, 2002). Given the importance of flexibility in ascertaining how much a learner has learnt from a course, OUSL and IGNOU assign 30% of total marks in their assignment portion, which BOU might consider for its assignment system.

Table: 5
Number Distribution of Assessment Procedure in BOU, OUSL and IGNOU

Universities	Assignment	Examinations
BOU (Bangladesh)	20%	80%
OUSL (Sri Lanka)	30%	70%
IGNOU (India)	30%	70%

Source: (Zhabg *et al.*, 2002)

Academic Support Services for the Learners of ODL system

Learner support is the most prominent aspect of open and distance learning (ODL) and refers to the resources that learners have the access in order to accomplish their learning activities. In ODL, the resources include a range of human and non-human resources to guide and facilitate the educational transactions of distance learners (Garrison, 1989; cited in Usun, 2004). The non-human resources in open and distance learning include printed materials, library facilities, various media and software programmes. ODL, in fact, is learner oriented, where the need for non-human resources is crucial along with human resources, i.e. teacher, tutor, media and administrative staffs. The student support system in BOU, in comparison to OUSL and INGOU is the focus of the subsequent sections.

Instructional System and Educational Opportunity

The most common instructional system of ODL is self-instruction with printed materials (i.e. textbooks) and optional television and radio broadcast (Murphy, 1991b; Murphy, 1996; Gunawardena, 1996; Demiray, 2002). Typically, the use of printed materials and technologies in ODL are one-way, albeit the open universities usually have a network of study centres and emphasise student-tutor interactions with flexible pacing. Looking at Table 6, it is clear that BOU tries to follow the same ODL model of instructional process, which is limited to face-to-face tutorial classes, printed materials and audio-visual aids. Though OUSL and IGNOU follow the one-way teaching process, they already have inaugurated system of support that includes access to library and ICT (for example: e-learning and mobile learning) facilities for the learners along with the three facilities

offered by BOU (i.e. face-to-face tutorial classes, printed materials and audio-visual aids).

Table: 6
Instructional System and Educational Opportunity Provided by BOU, OUSL and IGNOU

BOU	IGNOU	OUSL
1.Face to face tutorial class 2.Printed materials 3. Audio visual aids	1.Face to face tutorial class 2.Printed materials 3. Audio visual aids 4. Library facilities 5. ICT*: e-learning and mobile learning	1.Day schools/ discussion classes/ consultancy sessions/ tutorial clinics 2.Printed materials 3. Audio visual aids 4. Library facilities 5. ICT*

*** IGNOU / OUSL based on multimedia system.**

Technology-based Learner support depends on the type of technologies used in the ODL system and the facilities available that include live TV broadcasting, radio programmes and audio-video cassettes. Table 7 reveals that printed materials play a dominant role in open distance education in all of the chosen open universities. However, different feature can be observed in media usage. For BOU, the use of radio lesson/audio tape lesson is noticeably higher (8%) compared to other two universities. On the other hand, the use of television lesson in BOU is much lesser than that use of in OUSL and IGNOU. In support of less amount of time for BOU television programme, explanation can be multifaceted. The production and broadcast costs are the main factor that discourages BOU from producing and delivering TV programmes for the learners. In fact, most of the TV channels in Bangladesh do not show any interest for broadcasting educational programmes, which BOU needs to deliver for the distance learners. After negotiation with the National TV channel (BTV), limited time is allocated for broadcasting BOU's educational programmes. Finally, professional development with regards to media production and presentation are also imperative. For quality media production and media presentation, media training is crucial for media and academic staffs. It is hopeful that BOU academic staffs are now more involved in producing TV programmes. The authority is trying to increase the broadcasting time and in order to overcome the broadcasting drawbacks, they also trying to provide the facility of audio-video cassettes to the distance learners.

Table: 7
Proportionate Use of Major Media in the Instructional Process

Open Universities	Only Printed materials	Audio tape/ Radio lesson	Video tape/ Television lessons
BOU (Bangladesh)	85%	8%	7%
OUSL (Sri Lanka)	85%	5%	10%
IGNOU (India)	85%	5%	10%

Source: Zhabg *et al.* (2002)

Library Facility and Students' Access to Opportunity

The intention of ODL is to provide parallel learning for the deprived group of the society and to produce an educated population, who will be self-reliant and better able to fit into their immediate environment and interact successfully with the world.

Therefore, the well developed ODL System should be well supported by adequate library facilities like Learning Resource Centres, Media Resource Centres, Instructional Material Centres and so on (Ogunsola, 2004).

The distance learners can be informed and knowledgeable about the world with the availability of adequate library resources. Therefore, access to library facilities can be regarded as an important part of distant learner support.

The libraries of BOU and OUSL are mainly hybrid libraries having collections of different physical formats in varied media.

In contrast, IGNOU is not only a well-equipped hybrid library, it also has a collection of physical formats in diverse non-print media, such as electronic, magnetic, miniaturised microforms, optical, digital and virtual (Jagannathan, 2006).

Table: 8
The Library Access in BOU, OUSL and IGNOU

Universities / Target group	BOU			OUSL			IGNOU		
	HQ	RRC	TC	HQ	RC	SC	HQ	RC	SC
Teacher	√			√			√		
Support staffs	√			√			√		
Administration	√			√			√		
Research students	√			√			√		
Staff					√			√	
Academic counsellor					√			√	
Co-ordinator					√			√	
Students					√	√		√	√

Legend: HQ= Head Quarter; RRC= Regional Resource Centre; TC= Tutorial centre; RC= Regional Centre and SC= Study centre (Source: Zhabg *et al.*, 2002)

Table 8 illustrates that OUSL and IGNOU provide wider access to library facilities. They provide a full range of library facilities at headquarter, regional centres and study centres for their staffs and students. Students of OUSL and IGNOU have access to library at regional and study centre only. In contrast, library facilities are available only for university staffs in BOU, for example, teachers, and administration staffs at headquarter. Any research student from other institutions can use the BOU library having permission from the authority. There is no access to library facilities for the students of BOU at headquarter and RRCs, which is really undesirable.

Students have access to library at their tutorial centers and they can use the library during their learning session. In order to provide quality student educational support, this is the right time for BOU to follow the similar policy for library usage at headquarter, RRC and TC levels and it should be ensured that students have easy access to library facilities at all levels.

Counselling System

Counselling is important for distant learners since they have no opportunity of direct communication with their core teachers. IGNOU provides two different types of councelling for their students, such as-

- **Academic counselling: Academic counsellors help the students giving academic advice in the faculty as well as in the study centers.**
- **Intensive mobile academic counselling: IGNOU arranges intensive mobile academic counselling since regular counselling is difficult for its low population courses throughout the country. When public educational institutions are closed, IGNOU arranges mobile counselling with the help of the RC. The RC selects a day and a group of academic counsellors with audio-visual equipments travels in a van and**

meets the students at previously informed place and conducts counselling session during fixed hours.

To bridge the gap between the institution and the learners through instant respond to their academic and administrative queries; and to meet the students emerging need of information, IGNOU has attached fast tract on-line and interactive radio counselling. About 750 interactive nodes spread all over the country, which offer two-way interactive tele-counselling along with tele-teaching, tele-training, tele-discussion and extended contact programmes.

Technology-based and face-to-face counselling indicates IGNOU's academic counselling system reached state of the art stage compared to the other developed Open Universities standards.

Though OUSL counseling system is not as developed as that of the IGNOU, but it has the provision of academic counselling. Academic staffs of each of the faculties are available for general students counselling on academic matters. Students also have access to the Dean or the Head of the department, whenever necessary. Faculty student counsellors may be contacted for all non academic matters pertaining to the study programme.

To meet the emerging need of information of the students, BOU has a counselling and guidance cell located in the main campus. The staffs of this section help the students, who visit the main campus, giving information about the programmes. There is no provision of faculty based counselling on academic matters and no provision of counselling at the RCC and TC levels. Therefore, it can be said that BOU is lagged behind to provide faculty and modern technology based counselling, which OUSL and IGNOU offer for their students providing faculty based face to face counselling and internet based learning and counselling. In considering demand of the students, BOU has taken a new project for academic counseling, which offers short message service (SMS) classroom. In this project, the mobile technology's SMS along with perceived live telecast was used to create an ideal classroom situation for the distance learners through the Question Based Participation (QBP) technique (Alam, 2008). The SMS can be maintained for BOU's all programmes because of its effectiveness and for face to face interaction BOU can adopt the similar policy for student counselling offered by IGN OU and OUSL.

Policy Implications for BOU Open and Distance Learning System

BOU, as one of the public universities in Bangladesh, has taken a number of initiatives for its deprived population to deliver distance education from secondary to higher levels. This article has identified a number of key areas, which BOU needs to improve for quality education and lead the authors to propose some policy recommendations to improve teaching learning activities and students support services of BOU's distance education system. The following are the proposed recommendations:

1. **The printed course materials, the most powerful tool of distance learning, are available for the BOU learners. The use of modern technology in teaching-learning activities, for example, ICT based teaching-learning, are still far behind for BOU students (Islam et al., 2004). Therefore, the academics and policy-makers of BOU should bring a change in ODL paradigms to meet the challenges and the demands of fast-moving emerging sectors, i.e. globalisation and ICT. In addition to printed materials, BOU needs to take initiatives of offering computer-assisted education, internet and web-based instruction, or CD-ROM software to make it a 'virtual' university. At the same time, BOU should develop a communication protocols for each medium of instruction providing guidelines on how to use the different medium of instructions and provide orientation programmes for the students, who are new in distance learning system, focusing on how to learn skills, and how to learn through media (Gunawardena,1996; cited in Usun, 2004).**

Guideline and orientation also need for the teaching staffs and tutors, who are not familiar with ODL system and BOU can arrange orientation programme with the help of experienced faculty members, who already have received training on ODL system. Certainly, this will make a team spirit among the BOU members and can have a positive impact on staffs' professional development.

2. **Although BOU has the one-way technologies of radio, and television broadcasting along with textbooks, but there are some drawbacks of these broadcasting systems, such as suitability, accessibility and the production cost of the radio and television broadcasts. Specifically the TV and radio programmes are, to some extent, restricted owing to short period of broadcasting time by the government owned TV and radio stations. Further, other problems like an instable supply of electricity and frequent transmission interference in TV broadcasts by other stations from across the border of the country also hampered the TV and Radio delivery process (Kabir, 1995). To solve this problem, BOU can easily make available the audio and audio-visual programmes at RRCs and LCs for the learners providing audio, video cassettes and CD-ROM. It is expected that these initiatives can improve the current delivery system with a cost-effective manner.**
3. **Library support for the distant learners should be increased at central, RRC, LC and TC levels maintaining point of quantity and quality. For science students, BOU also needs to ensure the laboratory facilities to work in the RRCs or LCs like IGNOU and OUSL with adequate laboratory equipments. At the same time students must be encouraged to get actively involved in practical components (Harvey, 1992).**
4. **The direct interaction between tutors and learners is found only in the tutorial services in the TCs of BOU. However, the tutors should familiarise with the concept of open and distance learning providing effective tutor training by the BOU teaching staffs.**
5. **The academics of BOU should arrange faculty/schools based counselling. Faculty staffs can provide counselling at RRC, LC or TC level for effective learning. TV and Radio based counselling can also be helpful for the learners.**
6. **Finally, in order to provide effective student service support for quality education of the distance learners, BOU must increase education budget.**

CONCLUSION

With this paper the authors have attempted to portrait a comparative idea and information of BOU, OUSL and IGNOU. The number, diversity and quality of courses offered by any open university largely depend on organisation's resource (human and non-human) capacities. This article reveals that the number of courses increased significantly over the years in BOU and OUSL but compared to IGNOU, the trend of growth is remarkably slow. Though the growth of faculties and courses of OUSL did not expand like IGNOU, both of the universities have already taken the initiatives for offering wide range of higher level courses, particularly science and technology related subjects, in order to increase maximum potentiality of their human resources. More specifically, IGNOU extends its vast courses through professional integrity, quality, and efficient, extensive and functionally effective networks for diversified groups and collaborative learning that ultimately focus on national prosperity. The schools and courses run by BOU over the year indicate lack of initiatives, which is inadequate to meet the country's high demand of distance education courses. It further reflects a tremendous deficiency in technical and vocational courses like engineering, fashion design, textile, garment and leather, etc. Given importance on 21st century's need, BOU should take similar strategy like OUSL and IGNOU in the coming years to contribute in national development process through providing opportunities to its national with the scope of technical and vocational knowledge and skills. The study system of BOU is only limited to face to face tutorial classes, printed materials, audio visual aids, whereas OUSL and IGNOU have already established integration of support that includes students' access to laboratory, library and ICT (i.e. e-learning and mobile learning) facilities. For counselling

system, BOU is limited to information based counselling located only at headquarter but the facilities of OUSL and IGNOU are extended up to regional centres and even study centres. Through effective intervention of ICT, they made their educational system more effective, technical and dynamic. It is clear that BOU has made good progress during the last two decades to successfully run a number of formal and non-formal programmes but it is still largely dependent on traditional instructional process due to economic and infrastructural constraints.

Compared to IGNOU and OUSL, the usage of modern technology (i.e. ICT) in BOU tutorial approach is still far behind. Given importance on the demands of fast-moving emerging sectors, i.e. globalisation and ICT, BOU should implement innovative ideas through introducing ICT based education at its central and regional levels, where students will have the opportunities of counselling, two way teleconference, library and e- library facilities, good networking system and easy access to their core teachers for developing good level of interaction. Finally, to enhance BOU's potentiality there left few words to say 'where there is a will there is a way', which means if BOU implement all the identified steps, then it can be established as one of the state of the art Open Universities in the arena of world distance education in the future. Additionally, it was found that evidence and empirical data on characteristics, unique needs and socio-cultural context of the BOU learners are insufficient. Therefore, further research is needed to identify the possible areas of improvement. All these can enable BOU to meet the challenges of the learners' needs of 21st century.

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