

# **Bangladesh Open University: Some Issues Regarding the Developmental Processes of Online Teaching**

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## **1. Background of the Research**

Bangladesh Open University is the pioneer university of Bangladesh which gives education in open and distance mode (BOU, n.d.). Since its establishment in 1992, it has been serving the learners with self-learning text materials, audio-video lectures, face-to-face tutorial sessions etc. all over the country (Kamal & Sultana, 2011). Being a part of the global village BOU has to cope up with the new technologies. Therefore, the authority of BOU has decided to launch its programmes online. As it is going to be the first online university of Bangladesh so, it has to achieve the academic leadership in open and distance e learning. It has already taken initiatives like establishing an e-learning centre and Interactive Virtual Classrooms (IVCR), broadcasting audio and video lectures through Web TV and Web Radio (Alam, et. al. 2011). Still it is working on to start its online courses. Therefore, it is necessary to study and find out the obstacles regarding this issue. In this situation, the teachers of BOU will face many challenges. Because they need to develop their expertise in using technology which is important for an e-teacher.

This research focused on the challenges that BOU teachers will face in future to start their programmes online. In the context of BOU teachers, some capacity building trainings are necessary. This research also tried to find out the ways to overcome those challenges in a qualitative method. Primary data was collected through a questionnaire survey where the BOU teachers participated. Focus Group Discussions have been conducted with the teachers. In addition, in-depth interviews of the higher authority and policy makers were taken. Some effective training programmes should be arranged for the teachers to make them technologically sound. Besides, it is also important to make sure that the teachers can apply their knowledge and skill, which they have gained from the trainings to run their online courses.

Bangladesh Open University has started its journey with an aim to educate the drop out students from the mainstream education system of Bangladesh. It became very popular among the general people rapidly in mid 90s. It used to produce video and audio lectures from the

beginning of its establishment and these educational programmes were broadcasted in national radio and television for the learners. These video lectures were very popular among the mainstream students also. The faculty members of BOU participated in these programmes. At that time, learning through audio and video lectures was completely a new thing for the people of Bangladesh, which the BOU faculties introduced to the learners first time in our country.

At present days, things are totally different in the field of e-learning. A number of different technologies are introduced to deliver open and distance education to the learners. The way global networking has flourished with the emergence of internet, being a part of the world we have to cope up with this (Nichols, 2008). Now the Government of Bangladesh has developed a lot in the Information Technology sector. With the emergence of technology, the people started using internet enormously now. For this reason, online education is not a new idea at all in this country. BOU wants to be at par with merge with the world by starting online courses. However, for this it is required that the faculty members become adept in running their respective courses through the online mode. The first and main criterion for the BOU teachers is to become very sound in using technology. Most of the teachers are interested to increase their knowledge and skill in using technology. Still it is a challenge for them to run their courses online. This research attempted to find out the challenges of the faculty members and also carry out an in-depth study of the measures that the authority of BOU has planned to implement in this aspect. Finally, some recommendations have been made for the betterment of BOU's so that it can become a leading online institution in Bangladesh.

### **Purpose of the Research:**

- To identify the challenges that BOU teachers face to start their courses online.
- To find out what the BOU authority thinks about launching online courses.
- To describe how to overcome the problems on the way of starting online courses.
- To suggest the ways to face the challenges to become an online institution.

## **1. Methodology:**

### **Research Design:**

Sources of data: Both primary and secondary sources of data were used for data collection. Some secondary sources were also used to understand the research process prior to the research design.

### **Methods of Data Collection:**

#### ***Primary Data:***

Questionnaire survey, Focused Group Discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview methods were used for collecting primary data. A questionnaire survey was done with the faculty members of BOU. Seventy-five teachers from different schools or faculties took part in this survey. Focused Group Discussion was also conducted with the teachers where five to seven teachers were involved in the group discussion in each session. In depth interview of the Pro Vice Chancellor of BOU was taken. The interview of the Director of the e-learning centre of BOU was also taken. Then the interview of the dean of Open School was also taken.

#### ***Secondary Data:***

Secondary data was collected from different books, journals, research publications and web sites.

### **Nature of the Questionnaire:**

Researcher-administered questionnaire was used. Both closed and open-ended questions were included. Descriptive questions were also included in the questionnaire to collect information from the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of two pages (A4 size paper). The average interviewing time was thirty minutes.

### **Sampling Plan**

#### ***Target population:***

Elements: The target population of this research was the faculties of different schools of Bangladesh Open University.

Extent: Bangladesh Open University campus, Gazipur, Bangladesh

**Sampling technique:**

Non-probability Convenience sampling Method was used for selection and collection of the primary data

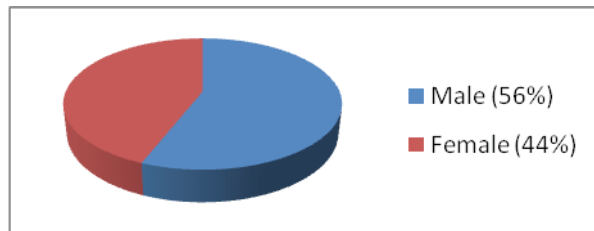
**Sample size:**

Survey was administered to seventy-five persons related to BOU.

**Profile of Respondents:**

Sex composition: Out of 75 respondents 42 were male and 33 were female. That means here 56% were male and 44% were female (Chart 1).

**Educational background: up to Masters Degree and above**

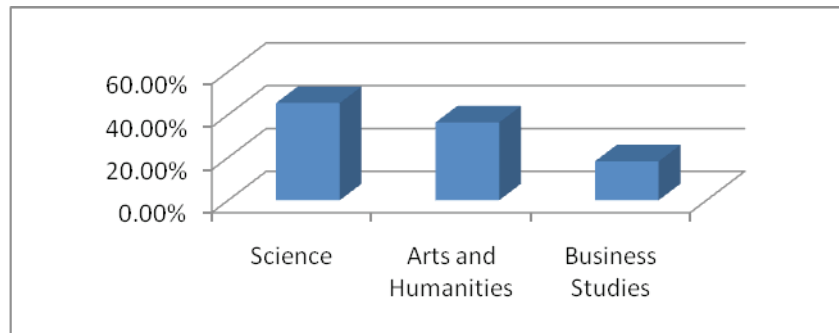


It was found that 45.45% were from Science background, 36.36% were from Arts and Humanities background and 18.18 % were from Business Studies background up to their Masters Degree level (Chart 2)

Length of the respondents' service at BOU:

The respondents have been working at BOU from 2 to 20 years.

**Chart 1:** Sex Composition of the Respondents



**Chart 2:** Educational Background of the Respondents

**3. Limitation of the Research:**

The very first limitation of this research is time restriction. It was

difficult to complete this work within a short period. The respondents were very busy and sometimes they were not interested to take part in this research. Therefore, it was not possible to collect data from all the teachers (130) of BOU, which could definitely provide a better result.

Another issue was gender balance. During the questionnaire survey, it was expected that 50% male and 50% female respondents would take part. However, sometimes teachers were very busy and could not manage time for this survey. It was included in the plan to insert more interviews of the people who are the education policy makers in our country but it was not possible to get their appointments. There was a plan to take an interview of the Vice Chancellor of BOU, which did not materialize.

#### **4. Scope of the Research:**

The academics can take help from this research if they work on the prospect of e-learning. The policy makers can also go through it before taking any concrete decision about starting online courses at BOU. Not only that the education policy makers of our country can have a look on this paper because in the near future e-learning is going to be very popular.

#### **5. Data Analysis and Result:**

##### ***Identifying the Problems:***

In this research, teachers of different levels like lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor and professor took part, which helped in identifying the different levels of problems. For example, the junior teachers showed keen interest to launch online courses because they are very techno-friendly. Being young and energetic, they have the spirit to do something new in the field of work. And, this is the main reason behind their inspiration for launching online courses.

On the other hand, the senior teachers were not very eager to start their programmes online. According to them, they did not have enough training to run their courses online. They were also worried about some realistic problems regarding this issue like the availability of internet, and the level of learners' educational and economical background especially those who are from the periphery of the society.

##### ***Observation of the Teachers:***

The views and opinions of the teachers about different issues were

focused on the questionnaire survey. They opined that the BOU authority should engage skilled manpower to execute online programmes and there should be a platform for the teachers through which they can easily run their courses online.

Different kinds of issues came up during the FGD with the teachers. Besides, the training programmes, the teachers should be prepared mentally to give their efforts to run online courses.

Another observation was found that the teachers should be given financial benefit for the training. Even after the training is completed, the teachers should be given financial incentive for developing the course content. Continuous feedback is needed to motivate the teachers to implement the knowledge and skill that they will get from the trainings. Besides, the higher authority should follow up as well as monitor the whole system of online teaching. They should ensure that the teachers are giving their best to design and run their courses online properly.

Most of the teachers expect implementation of the training programmes by the authority. However, there is a lapse in the context because successful completion of the training programme does not lead to the implementation of the training. As a result, the teachers cannot practice, and apply their knowledge gathered from the training. This is the reality in the context of BOU.

### ***Observation of the higher authorities of BOU:***

It has been observed that several problems prevail in the e-learning centres. Technological support is not always available. There is lack of software also. An e-learning centre cannot run online courses online properly in such conditions. Therefore, the e-learning centre must be well equipped as well as all the support systems must be workable. For this reason, the help of the higher authorities of BOU is very essential.

The heads of different faculties or schools insist that there should be a structured plan for running courses online. In addition, the higher authority should have the commitment to make it successful so that the teachers get inspiration to work as e-teacher.

Finally the higher authority, asserts to have already provided the e-learning centre with Learning Management System (LMS) and human resources though it is not sufficient. They have launched two MBA courses online experimentally. The administration of BOU is ready to give every support, mainly financial support for launching e-learning

courses. After training programmes are completed, the authority will also follow-up and monitor centrally so that the implementation of the trainings work properly. Besides, Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and BOU will work together. This joint collaboration will hopefully bring a new revolution in e-learning.

## **6 Discussion:**

After analyzing the collected data from different sources, it was found that BOU teachers have a keen interest to start their courses online at the earliest. It is not only a matter of being e-teacher but also being a part of the leading e-learning institute in Bangladesh.

The Government of Bangladesh has a plan to establish a digital university in Gazipur district where BOU is situated. So it is a matter of prestige for BOU to go ahead for e-learning soon so that they can take the leadership in this field. As BOU was established in 1992, since then they have been working on open and distance education in Bangladesh. Now in this 21<sup>st</sup> century they should start delivering their education through online mode so that they can serve their learners better than any other digital universities in the country.

It should be mentioned that open and distance education has flourished all over the world at a very fast rate within a couple of years, in Malaysia, India and New Zealand (E-Learning Advisory Group, 2002 and Marshall & Mitchell, 2005). It has become very popular among the people now a days, in different countries of the world where open universities are providing education through e-learning. So, BOU should try to focus on this issue and take necessary steps to reach their goal.

From the focused group discussions, many points got highlighted. Although most of the teachers want their courses to be online soon, they were worried about their preparation for this. They were worried about the efficiency of the e-learning centre. Also, they thought about the possibility of getting support and help, from the e-learning centres. Starting with online programmes is a team work, and it totally depends on the cooperation of teachers and the e-learning centre.

## **7. Recommendations:**

The Government of Bangladesh has a plan to build the country as 'Digital Bangladesh.' A digital university is going to be launched soon. Therefore, a revolution is coming in the field of information technology, and of course in the education sector in general. It is necessary to cope

up with the emerging digital country. Apart from BOU, many other public and private traditional universities are planning to introduce online programmes. Being the only open university of the country, BOU should be the pioneer for online university in the country. The following steps can be taken in the present situation.

- The training programmes and workshops must be arranged for the teachers.
- The implementation of the knowledge achieved from training must be ensured.
- Both the teachers and the e-learning centres should work as a team to launch and run the online programmes.
- The higher authority of BOU should keep monitoring the whole system to make sure that everything is going on properly.
- The policy makers of BOU can take help from the Government of Bangladesh regarding this matter, if needed.
- There are many organizations across the world working for the prosperity of distance education. BOU can ask them for help for the betterment of the university.

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