QUALITY ASSURANCE IN SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAME OF BANGLADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY:
Present Status and Challenges

Associate Professor Dr. Zobaida AKHTER
Bangladesh Open University
BANGLADESH

ABSTRACT

In the present day in national and international perspectives, quality is the top of most agendas. Quality of education has significant impact and invaluable contribution to the area of development. Recently, the SSC & HSC program of BOU have earned recognition of equivalency with the formal education sector, which has naturally raised the question of quality assurance of these programs By applying the quantitative method, the study has assessed the present status of the quality of SSC & HSC program of BOU and also put some recommendations to meet the challenges for further development.

Keywords: BOU, Quality, Assurance, Recognition, equivalency.

INTRODUCTION

In the present day national and international perspectives, quality is at the top of most agendas. Similarly improving quality of education is probably the most important task facing any educational institution. Quality of education has significant impact and invaluable contribution to the area of human development. Students, therefore, have right to receive an education of good quality and quality of education is associated with different academic and institutional factors. Usually, we consider classroom is the best place for learning to the students.

DEFINITION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Despite the growing concern about the quality of education, its crystallizes definition is somewhat difficult (Aspin and Chapman, 1994) largely due to a wide array of stakeholders and consumers along with the complexities of teaching-learning process which need to be unfolded continuously. Distance methodologies could be judged as a duplicate to classroom experience, if quality could be ensured by innovating new methods it could be validated the quality of distance learning program. Quality assurance also has been defined as "systematic management and assessment procedure adopted by higher education institutions and systems in order to monitor performance against objectives, and to ensure achievement of quality outputs and quality improvements" (Harman, 2000, p.1). Terms like effectiveness, efficiency, equity, equality and quality are often used interchangeably. (Adams, 1993) As societies evolve from the post industrial era to the information of age, Distance education in the developing country has got the central importance and subject to study. For instance, interactive communication between and among students and teachers is now being emphasizes (Belwati, 1999) footnote

The Open School of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is presently imparting two educational programs, namely SSC and HSC. These programs are basically providing an excellent opportunity of continuing education to those, who were either dropped out from basic education program, both in formal and non-formal education sectors or were unable to avail further educational opportunities due to various reasons. Recently these two programs have earned recognition of equivalency to those of formal education sector, which has naturally raised a question of quality assurance of BOU programs. This has led to conduct this study where the state of quality of SSC and HSC programs of BOU has been reviewed. It also looks into the barriers/problems challenges of quality measures and have been identified to which BOU should converge all its efforts for providing a quality education to its clientele groups.

Theoretical framework

> ➢ **To asses the present status of quality of the programs.**
> ➢ **To identify the challenges of quality assurance in secondary education of BOU.**
> ➢ **To explore the area of improvement to meet the challenges of quality.**

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative and Qualitative methodology has been adopted. Documentary analysis is also done. Only close ended questionnaire was supplied to the target group. Within the target groups, 12 teachers, 15 tutors and 50 students were included. The methodologies for the successful findings of the study were followed:

> ➢ **Documentary analysis**
> ➢ **Record observation**
> ➢ **Collection of information through structured questionnaire**

The questionnaires were supplied to the following target groups:

> ➢ **Students of Open School, Bangladesh Open University**
> ➢ **Tutors of the tutorial centre**
> ➢ **Teachers of Bangladesh Open University**

They fulfilled the questionnaire with much interest. The output of the questionnaire is satisfactory. Considering the objectives of assessment of the studies, one set of questionnaire is prepared for the three groups of respondents. The questionnaires have only close-ended questions. Question was prepared in Bengali for the convenience of the students.

RESULTS OF THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To assess the quality assurance in secondary education program of Bangladesh Open University, same set of questionnaire is supplied to the target groups. Students, tutors, and the teachers of BOU are included in the target groups; the feedback from the questionnaire is satisfactory. The opinion collected is shown below through the various tables.

Table: 1
SSC & HSC program of BOU keeping pace with time

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher		75 %		25%	
Student	50%	16.67%		16.67%	16.66%
Tutor	14.29%	57.14%		28.57%	

Amongst the teachers of BOU 75% agree that the SSC and HSC program of BOU is maintaining its relation to the updated knowledge through printing materials and audio-visual presentation. Only 25% disagree with the previous opinion.50% students strongly agree, 16.67% agree, 16.67% disagree and 16.66% strongly disagree. 14.29% tutors strongly agree, 57.14% agree and 28.57% disagree with the opinion.

Table: 2
Logical continuity between the courses

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher		75%		25%	
Student	50%	16.67%			33.33%
Tutor		85.71%		14.29	

75% of the teaching staff of BOU agreed that the courses of BOU presented before the students have a logical continuity, 25% disagree with the matter. Amongst the students 50% strongly agree with the opinion, 16.67% agree and 33.33% strongly disagree with the statement.

85.71% tutors believe in the logical continuation between the courses and 14.29% disagree with the matter.

Table: 3
The subject-matter of the courses is clear

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher		50%	50%		
Student	66.71%	16.62%		16.67%	
Tutor				100%	

When the respondents are asked about the matter, 100% tutor disagrees with this because they think that most of the students are not serious about their study because of their economic crisis and lack of time.

They have to earn side by side with their study, so the subject matter of the courses seem to them hard. 50% teachers agree and to 50% the matter is undecided. 66.71% students strongly agree, 16.62% agree and 16.67% disagree.

Table: 4
Subject matter of the courses is harmonious with the cognitive level of the students

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher	25%	50%			
Student	16.67%	23.33%		16,67%	43.33%
Tutor				100%	

Bangladesh Open University has bound to follow the national curriculum by applying its own method of teaching.

But we know that the level of intellect, practice and environment of the student of BOU is inconvenient than that of the regular students of conventional system. 100% tutors disagree with the matter that the courses offer from BOU is harmonious with the cognitive level of the students of BOU. 25% teachers of BOU strongly agree and 50% teachers agree with the matter and other 25% teachers do not answer.

16.67% students strongly agree, 23.33% agree, 16.67% disagree and 43.33% strongly disagree with the matter.

Table: 5
Modular system reflect the goal of the courses properly

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher	50%	25%		25%	
Student	16.67%	16.71%		33.33%	16.67%
Tutor				100%	

50% teachers strongly agree that the modular system is written properly and also acceptable to the students, 25% teachers only agree and 25% are undecided.

On the other hand 16.67% students strongly agree, 16.71% agree, 33.33% disagree 16.67% strongly disagree and 15.62% did not answer.

Amongst the tutors 100% disagree that the modular system is not meeting up the goal of the courses properly.

Table: 6
Text book of BOU are standard as the text book of national curriculum

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher		25%		75%	
Student	66.67%			33.33%	
Tutor		15.29%		84.71%	

25% teachers agree and 75% teachers disagree with the statement. 66.67% strongly believe that the text book of SSC & HSC of BOU is no less standard than the text book of the national curriculum, 33.33% disagree with others. Amongst the tutors 15.29% agree that the quality of the text book of BOU is similar to the text book of national curriculum, 84.71% do not accept the matter.

Table: 7
Tutors of BOU need training in distance education

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher			50%	50%	
Student	16.67%	16.67%	33.33%	16.67%	16.66%
Tutor		28.57%		71.42%	

About the question, 50% teachers are not sure whether it is necessary to give training to the tutor or whether it is possible.

Because the tutors are not permanent staff of BOU, in that case training should be given to a large number of teachers. 50% teacher disagrees with the matter.

16.67% students strongly agree, 16.67% agree, 33.33% undecided, 16.67% disagree and 16.66% strongly disagree. Amongst the teachers 28.57% agree and 71.42% teachers disagree.

Table: 8
Tutors follow the conventional system in delivering their lecture

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher	25%		25%		50%
Student	16.71%	16.71%		16.71%	33.33%
Tutor	14.29%	57.14%		28.57%	

The answer of the question seems a little bit contradictory. 25% teachers strongly agree, 25% undecided and 50% teachers strongly disagree. On the other hand, 14.29% tutors agree, 57.14% agree and 28% disagree. Where 50% teachers strongly disagree, only 28.57% tutors disagree. 16.71% students strongly agree, 16.71% agree, 16.71% disagree 33.33% strongly disagree and 16.64% did not answer.

Table: 9
Steps should be taken to upgrade the quality of the tutor's performance

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher	50%			25%	
Student	16.71%			66.67%	
Tutor				100%	

50% teachers are in favor of the up gradation of the quality of the tutor's performance, 25% disagree with the opinion and 25% did not response. 16.71% students strongly agree wit the matter, 66.67% students disagree. 39

It is very encouraging to notice that 100% tutors do not believe that they have any necessity to upgrade their quality of performance.

Table: 10
Tutorial class twice in a month is sufficient

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher		100%			
Student		66.67%		16.71%	
Tutor		42.86%		57.14%	

100% teachers of BOU think that if the number of tutorial class could be increased, it will be beneficial for the students. 66.67% students agree and 16.71% students disagree with the opinion and 16.62% student did not answer. 42.86% tutors agree and 57.14% tutors disagree.

Table: 11
Interaction between tutors and students are not effective

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher		100%			
Student		16.67%	16.67%	33.33%	33.33%
Tutor	14.29%	57.14%		14.29%	

Interaction seems to be the important factor of quality education, the question was asked to the respondents.100% teacher agree that there is a good interaction between the students and tutors. 16.67% students strongly agree, 33.33% students agree, 33.33% students strongly disagree with the matter and 16.67% are undecided.

Amongst the tutor 14.29% strongly agree, 57.14% agree and 14.29% disagree with the matter.

Table: 12
Student support service are giving full support in
successful implementation of BOU programs

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher		25%	50%	25%	
Student	33.33%	50%		16.67%	
Tutor				100%	

25% teachers agree, 50% are undecided and 25% disagree with the opinion. 33.33% students strongly agree, 50% agree and 16.67% disagree.

100% tutor disagree with the statement that SSS is giving full support in implementing the goal of BOU.

Table: 13
Subject matter presented in the audio-visual media should be clearly receptive

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher		100%			
Student	16.67%	16.66%		66.67%	
Tutor				100%	

100% teachers agree that the audio-visual programs presented by BOU are completely helpful to the students. 16.67% students strongly agree, 16.66% agree and 66.67% disagree with the opinion. 100% tutors disagree with the statement.

Table: 14
Audio-Visual support is most important component for the success of the SSC & HSC program of BOU

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher		50%		50%	
Student	33.33%	33.33%			
Tutor	42.86%	14.28%		42.86%	

50% teachers agree that audio-visual support is important for the students and 50% did not agree. 33.33% strongly agree, 33.33% agree and 33.34% of the students did not answer to the question.

There are diversified responses from the tutors, 42.86% strongly agree, 14.28% agree and 42.86% disagree with the opinion.

Table: 15
The performance of examination division regarding exam related issues are satisfactory

Respondents	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher		50%		50%	
Student		43.33%			56.67%
Tutor		38.57%		61.43%	

50% teachers agree that the performance of the examination division is satisfactory and 50% teachers disagree with the statement. Amongst the students 43.33% agree and 56.67% strongly disagree with the matter.

38.57% tutors agree and 61.43% tutors showed their dissatisfaction with performance of examination division. Sometimes they fail to follow the academic calendar of taking and publishing the results timely.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The effectiveness of the study is measured from the questionnaire, documentary analysis. Though the effectiveness of recommendation is satisfactory, but it could have better impact if wider aspects of the studies were taken into consideration. Due to the limitation of the scope, it has to complete the study within a limited sphere.

- Effective distance learning requires extensive preparation to overcome the traditional strategies of learning materials and teaching methods. So, strategies should be taken to transform the traditional learning attitude and system to a new-learning environment.
- There are many ways to ensure the quality of distance education. Teachers of BOU may visit distant site or students may take a trip to the students.
- Interaction between students and teachers could be increased by audio-visual teleconferencing or email or fax question or postal system.
- Tutorial class should be increased. Frequent contact is necessary for the better understanding between the students and teachers and as a whole with the new system of learning.
- The tutors should be trained in effective distance education strategies. It should be taken into consideration that the traditional way of teaching is far away different from the distance learning technology.
- Student Support system should be strengthened by putting emphasis on the timely delivery of printing materials and other services. Their attitude should be always helping attitude towards the students.
- It is apparent that the quality of the teaching of the tutors is to a large extent dependent on the tutors ability or input. Therefore, it is recommended   that in order to ensure the quality of teaching in distance education, the tutors should be a party of the writing or course material review team.
- Curriculum should be periodically revised and update according to par with national curriculum.
- It should be taken into consideration that the students are getting meaningful learning and are actively participate with the system.
- 10. Opportunities should be increased of the evaluation and monitoring system.
- Research should be encouraged to determine quality assurance in distance education and evaluate faculty teaching at distance level.
- A strong printing material can provide much of the basic instructional content in the form of course text.
- Electronic mail can be used to send messages, assigned feedback to the targeted group; it can also be used to increase interaction between the students and teachers.
- Student Support Service is the key enterprise responsible for the success of the programs in distance education. They should have a positive attitude and devotion to bridge up the gap between students, teachers, tutors and administration effectively.
- Examination Division is wholly responsible for taking exam and publishing result. Therefore, it is important to follow the academic calendar in regard exam activities so that the students of distance education proceed as par with the students of the conventional system.
- Curriculum should be periodically revised and updated in order to introduce the recent development of the programs.

- ➢ **Pedagogical process should be transformed so that all the students may receive quality education.**
- ➢ **Finally, administration of distance education has a wider scope flexibility to innovate an exceptional something. Their potentiality, promptness in decision making and pragmatic action could ensure the quality of any programs in distance education.**

CONCLUSION

While secondary age group students are definitely thought to need environment of the school as support for their learning, the opportunity should be given to the students to complete their education with competence. However technologies need to be used in the distance mode in such a way as to promote them as potential workforce in the society. Component of quality in technology-based educational material include, instructional design and delivery and student support. (Bates, 2000)

Successful distance education system includes interaction between teachers and students, between students and learning environment and amongst students themselves, as well as active interaction in the classroom. Interaction takes many forms; it is not just limited to audio and video, or solely to teachers and students interaction. It represents the connections feel with the distance teachers, the local teachers and the facilitators and then peers.

Usually, it is thought that classroom is the best place for learning to occur.

Distance learning methodologies judged primarily on their abilities to duplicate classroom experience. Policies and strategies need to be revised to guarantee that the distance education do not assure a single-campus delivery model but are effective, supportive for multi-campus students.

By proper application of distance education program, it will be possible to make an effective linkage between education and economic development of the state. Finally, it can be said that the quality of the successful program of distance education could be assured, if the programs rely on the consistent and integrated efforts of students, faculty, facilitators, support staff and administrators.

To meet the global challenge, to meet the global economy by producing effective manpower, quality of the institution should be ensured.

Thus, it is clearly imperative that educational institutions continuously improve the quality of their educational provision (UT, 2002) .

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of AUTHOR

Zobaida AKHTER, is associate professor, at Bangladesh Open University, Bangladesh, Conducting studies and research in different aspects of open learning, with emphasis on Gender, and on Women's development through education. Developed training materials, curriculum for the NGOs towards the development of common basic education program all over the country. Her Ph.D. in Women and Equality: The Context of Bangladesh, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2001.

Postgraduate Diploma in Women Studies-Body project, University of Hannover, Hannover, Germany and International Women's University - IFU, Germany, 2000. M.A in Philosophy, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1977. B.A (Hons.) in Philosophy, University of Dhaka Dhaka, Bangladesh,1976.

She was Senior Consultant (Gender and Public Awareness), Multi-Sectoral Program on Violence Against Women (MSP-VAW), Dhaka, Bangladesh, 15 October 2006–15 April 2007. And, National Consultant (Gender and Development Specialist), Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP), Phase-II, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 01 January 2005 -31 May 2005. Than National Consultant (Female Education Studies Specialist), Female Secondary School Assistance Project, Phase-II, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 04 May 2003 - 04 August 2003.

In addition, she was National Consultant (Gender and Public Awareness), Multi-Sectoral Program on Violence Against Women (MSP-VAW), Dhaka, Bangladesh, 01 March 2001-30 September 2002

Associate Professor Dr. Zobaida AKHTER
G-1 (9th floor) Bhaduri Tower, 1/B Paribagh,
Dhaka-1000, BANGLADESH
Phone: 88 02 9675317
Fax: 88 02 9675317
Mobile: 88 01715 011224
Emails: zobaidaakhter@hotmail.com, zobaida@gmail.com

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