



ODE in Bangladesh compared with that in Sri Lanka and India

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ABSTRACT :

The growth of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Bangladesh Open University (BOU) in comparison to the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) and the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) have been descriptively analysed in terms of the administrative and academic structure. This paper presents a comparative view of open and distance education in BOU, OUSL and IGNOU in relation to courses offered by them and the relevance of the courses (academic component) ; the role of Regional and Study Centres ; study and learning systems; examination and evaluation procedures; instructional methods ; and library and counselling facilities (administrative component). As a part after the discussion of the existing academic and administrative structure in the Distance Teaching Institution (DTI) identifies useful strategies, such as enhanced use of ICT facilities ; launch of new programme of study and schools to offer/govern them ; increase the effectiveness of existing courses, introduce library and e-library facilities and develop multi-perspective counselling tactics, through which BOU can move forward adopting the strategies offered by OUSL and IGNOU.

1. INTRODUCTION :

The perpetual need for education is encountered since time immemorial. Distance education has emerged out of social compulsion of providing the avenues for equit of access to education, the dynamics of change effected in the education field due to globalization and liberalization of economy and new cultures ventured by educationists by being taken as a business rather than as a philanthropic activity. In addition, it can be said that the failure of traditional Conventional Educational Systems to be able to meet the demand in countries, due to the limited availability of seats and reservation of the seats for the specific category of learners; the limited resources available for tertiary education due to the government funding,

self-financing of the learners, 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 cost-effective 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 seats in tertiary institutions of the individual's preference, the higher cost incurred in the process of access to education and a shortage of teachers for academic transactions, physical stru are the main factors for increasing the popularity of distance education (Duncan, *et al.*, 2003). At this juncture, it is worthy to recall the definition proposed by Khan (1999) "Open

and distance learning is not supplementary, complementary or alternative to the conventional system. It is part of the evolution of new methodologies in teaching and learning". Bangladesh, a democratic nation near the Indian Subcontinent and Burma facing the Bay of Bengal has also taken the opportunity to provide a uniform and mass oriented universal system of education through Open and Distance Education by establishing Bangladesh Open University (BOU) in 1992. The strategic vision of BOU is to increase the knowledge and skills of the workforce by providing improved modes of education system to the people, who had either dropped out or could not get access to the conventional educational system. BOU provides the opportunity for further education of the disadvantaged population to accomplish their desire of learning through continuing and enhance the skill and their potential through distance education. The ultimate goal of BOU is to develop the human resource development, upgrade skills and gradually uplift the standard of national education performance.

As on date only one public university exists in Bangladesh to provide distance education as a method of delivery. BOU was established in 1992. BOU was established by the Act of Parliament and 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 democratising 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 staff. 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 global situation of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), BOU is still staying far behind in adopting modern technologies to teach their distance learners. Due to economic and infrastructural constraints besides the entry eligibility of the learners (less knowledge), 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).

The objectives of this study are to

(1) assess the overall status of BOU in comparison with the open universities of two neighboring South Asian countries considering the Administrative structural functions; Courses and instructional strategies; Learning opportunities; and Library, laboratory and counselling facilities; and

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

It is anticipated that the discussions in this paper in association with the neighbouring countries would have policy implications for making BOU more effective for rendering service to the learners.

2. METHODS :

This study is descriptive in nature and has used documentary and secondary data as a tool of analysis. Information about the universities examined in this paper were generated from various sources including university documents, the literature on the mandate for 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. In addition, it is also cost effective and has economy of time 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. 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 for comparison for want of time and similarity of the educational system right from the colonial rule.

3. RESULTS :

The success of ODL largely depends on the support and opportunities offered by the organisation to its learners, where the extent of Learner Support Services largely depends on the particular institution's capacity and the availability of resources (Usun, 2004). Accordingly, the status of BOU will be discussed on the basis of the following two aspects :-

(1) 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 learners performance.

(2) 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 but depend on the existing Conventional Educational System (CES) network. In general, ODL is delivered from the institution's headquarters with the administrative and teaching support of RC/RRC, LC and TC/SC. The Teaching faculties are responsible for planning, designing and writing the educational materials for their learners. The universities continue to register learners; arrange and conduct examinations; prepare and produce printed materials, visual and audio cassettes to supplement the course materials and to dispatch them to learners with the help of different divisions (i.e. DPD, computer division etc.), regional centres, local centres and tutorial or student centres responsible for rendering Learner Support Services.

Functional Structure of the Open Universities

The comparative academic structural functions of the three open universities in the current study namely BOU, OUSL and IGNOU, are presented in Figure 1. The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) 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 Institutions within India and in partnership with 36 countries. IGNOU delivers education through the network of RC's, sub-RCs, SC's/TLC's for its learners, 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 together in

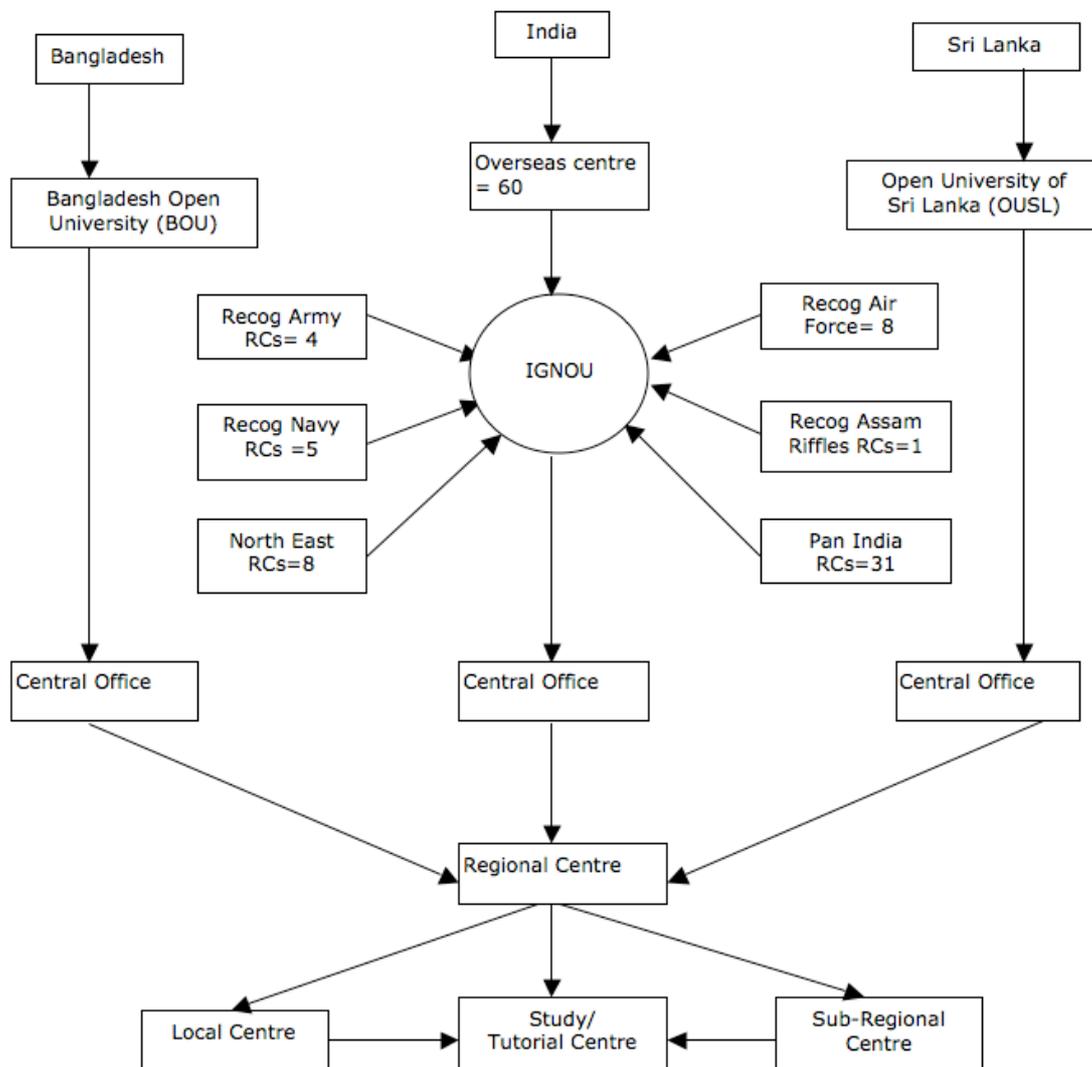


Figure 1 : Academic structure of BOU, OUSL, and IGNOU

cooperation of RCs, LCs and TCs/SCs. It is important to note that LCs can be found only in BOU.

The three different organisational structures existing in the DTI under study are depicted in Figure 1, which the selected universities follow for transferring education as per their educational requirements through ODL system. They three include :

(1) 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,

(2) Four-Tier Organisational Structure: This structure comprises the central office, regional centres, local centres and tutorial centres. In some instances, BOU follows this structure, and

(3) Five-Tier Organisational Structure: This structure comprises the central office, RCs, sub-RCs, partnership overseas RCs and SCs, which exists only in IGNOU.

Number of Schools and Faculties

The main responsibilities of school or faculties are to offer different courses suiting to the needs of the distance learners. In brief, the schools/faculties are responsible for three tasks namely designing the content of course materials, (Self-instructional materials) media production and broadcast from Open University Radio and TV studios (Supplementary materials) and the arrangement of academic counselling and examinations (academic transactions). As shown from Table 1, Bangladesh Open University offers two different types of programmes, i.e. formal and non-formal under the aegis of six different schools. BOU has already launched 21 formal programmes, which consist of Programmes leading to the certificate, diploma, undergraduate and post-graduate levels of education, amounting to 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 & 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. As per the common prospectus (2012) IGNOU, runs 338 academic programmes comprising 1300 courses at Certificate, Diploma, Under-Graduate, Post-Graduate and Doctoral levels in various fields of study under 21 schools. Further, a number of non-accredited extension and skill-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 the IGNOU's operations in 36 countries like Singapore, Ethiopia, Nepal, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Omar, Kuwait, Afghanistan and Sharjah where the Indian diaspora are found. The Commonwealth of

Learning (COL) has recognised IGNOU as a Centre 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 UNESCO (IGNOU website, 2008). IGNOU has now established itself not only as the mega-university but also the education provider for the underprivileged in the commonwealth countries by giving fellowships and grants.

According to Dorothy & Kumar (2011), in Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), the models envisaged once as 'reengineering models' for the management of the Distance Education System has been experienced and has undergone metamorphosis with changes incorporated for optimum reach. For instance at IGNOU, the initial notion of establishment of the Learner Support Centres (LSC) in a Institution of higher learning (Study Centre) has diversified to Non-Governmental Organisations, Prisons, (Special Study Centre) to Programmes of specific interest Institutions (Programme Study Centre) to special audience like the Army, Navy, and Airforce personnel (Recognised Study Centre and Gyandeeep project) to community linked local development oriented Community Colleges Scheme to massification of the IGNOU Programmes through the privately/publicly managed Conventional Educational System (CES) by means of the Convergence Scheme (Partner Institute) to optimising reach (North Eastern Region Project) to taking education beyond the frontiers of India by venturing through the International Division (Partner Institute outside India). The organisational structure of the IGNOU has also widened to accommodate on-the campus learners besides the distance learners at their own place and captive distance learners (as in national prisons).

Management of ODL Exam System

The examination procedure of Open and Distance Education is relatively different from the Conventional Education System. In the ODL system, in fact, the Central Office,

Table 1 : School / Faculties with Courses offered by BOU, OUSL and IGNOU

BOU	IGNOU	OUSL
<p>1. School of Social Science, Humanities and Languages (SSHL) <i>BA/BSS (Bachelor of Arts/Social Science)</i> <i>CELP (Certificate in English Language Teaching)</i> <i>CALP (Certificate in Arabic Language Teaching)</i> <i>BELT (Bachelor of English Language Teaching)</i></p> <p>2. School of Science & Technology (SST) <i>Diploma in Computer Science & Application (DCSA)</i> <i>B Sc. In Nursing</i></p> <p>3. School of Education (SoE) <i>Cert in Education (C Ed)</i> <i>Bachelor in Education (B Ed)</i> <i>Master of Education (M Ed)</i></p> <p>4. School of Business (SoB) <i>Cert in Management (CIM)</i> <i>B Business Admin (BBA)</i> <i>PG Dip Management (PGDM)</i> <i>M Business Admin (MBA)</i> <i>Commonwealth Executive MBA (CEMBA)</i> <i>Commonwealth Executive Master of Public Administration (CEMPA)</i></p> <p>5. School of Agriculture & Rural Development (SAARD) <i>Bachelor of Agricultural Education (B Ag. Ed)</i> <i>Dip Youth Dev (DYD)</i> <i>Certificate in Livestock and Poultry (CLP)</i> <i>Certificate in Pisciculture and Fish Processing (CPFP)</i></p> <p>6. Open School (OS) <i>Secondary School Cert (SSC)</i> <i>Higher School Cert (HSC)</i> <i>B Business Studies (BBS)</i> <i>Junior School Cert (JSC)</i></p> <p>7. School of Law (SOL)</p>	<p>School of Humanities</p> <p>School of Social Science</p> <p>School of Science</p> <p>School of Education</p> <p>School of Continuing Education</p> <p>School of Management Studies</p> <p>School of Engineering & Technology</p> <p>School of Health Science</p> <p>School of Computer & Information Science</p> <p>School of Agriculture</p> <p>School of Journalism and New Media Studies</p> <p>School of Gender and Development Studies</p> <p>School of Tourism Hospitality Service Secretarial Management</p> <p>School of Interdisciplinary and Trans-disciplinary Studies</p> <p>School of Social Work</p> <p>School of Law</p> <p>School of Vocational Education and Training</p> <p>School of Extension and Development Studies</p> <p>School of Foreign Languages</p> <p>School of Translation Studies and Training</p> <p>School of Performing and Visual Arts</p>	<p>1. Humanities & Social Sciences <i>Department of legal studies</i> <i>Education</i> <i>Language studies</i> <i>Management Studies</i> <i>Social studies</i></p> <p>2. Natural Sciences <i>Botany</i> <i>Chemistry</i> <i>Mathematics & Computer Science</i> <i>Physics</i> <i>Health Science</i> <i>Zoology</i></p> <p>3. Faculty of Education 1 <i>Early Childhood & Primary Education</i> <i>Secondary and Tertiary Education</i> <i>Special Needs Education</i></p> <p>4. School of Engineering & Technology <i>Agricultural & Plantation Engineering</i> <i>Civil Engineering</i> <i>Electrical and Computer Engineering</i> <i>Mathematics and Philosophy of Engineering</i> <i>Mechanical Engineering</i> <i>Textile and Apparel Technology</i></p>

details IGNOU courses at <http://www.ignou.ac.in/ignou/aboutignou/school>

Table 2 : Management of the Examination System

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

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

BOU	IGNOU	OUSL
Teaching practice Laboratory work Field work	Summer/winter schools Laboratory work Field work	Laboratory work

Regional Centres, Tutorial or Study centers take responsibility for managing and operating examinations. As depicted 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, while 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.

Apart from examinations, as part of academic evaluation, a similarity in all of the three universities exist wherein additional assessment activities are arranged. 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 learners practice their teaching learning activities in the affiliated tutorial centres under the guidance of subject tutors. Fieldwork and laboratory work are the significant aspects of the OUSL and IGNOU teaching learning activities. IGNOU provides full laboratory facilities for its science learners under the supervision of RCs. The science learners 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 fieldwork only for geography course of BA/BSS programme and it provides science and computer laboratory facilities for the learners through the negotiation of the concern tutorial centers. BOU can adopt the similar strategy of IGNOU and OUSL for the learners offering laboratory facilities in the central office, regional or local centers of BOU. Certainly this initiative can improve the quality of education and also increasing the access and BOU can offer more technology-based courses for the learners.

Table 4 : Evaluation System for Student Assessment

BOU	IGNOU	OUSL
Self evaluation or reflected evaluation	Self evaluation or reflected evaluation	Continuous assessment by means of assignment and assessment test.
Internal assessment or formative evaluation by means of assignment / TMA.	Internal assessment or formative evaluation by means of assignment	Project work
Project work	Project work	Final examination
Term end evaluation or summative evaluation	Term end evaluation or summative evaluation	

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

BOU	IGNOU	OUSL
Assignments 20%	Assignments 30%	Assignments 30%
Examinations 80%	Examinations 70%	Examinations 70%

Evaluation System

In assessing the academic performance of the learners enrolled, BOU, OUSL and IGNOU follow similar systems. The evaluation methodology in BOU, OUSL and IGNOU are mainly a combination of assignments, Project work (Continuous Assessment) and Term-end examinations as summarised in Table 4. Provision of project work can be found in BOU, OUSL and IGNOU at Under-Graduate Post Graduate levels and Doctoral levels.

BOU, OUSL and IGNOU use similar techniques for distribution of marks. The overall performance of learners is published after assigning weightage for each of the component to the assignments and the result obtained in final examinations as shown in Table 5. The findings reveal that 20% of the marks are allocated for assignment work in BOU, while in OUSL and IGNOU assignments account for 30% of the total marks. Most of the assignments given by BOU are essays given on a set topic from

the syllabi prescribed for the Programme of study but OUSL and IGNOU use multiple-choice questions and short open questions also besides the essay type 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.

Academic Learner Support Services

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 the printed materials, library facilities, and the various

Table 6 : Instructional System and Educational Opportunity

BOU	IGNOU	OUSL
Face to face tutorial class Printed materials Audio visual aids	Face to face tutorial class Printed materials Audio visual aids Library facilities ICT, e-learning, and mobile learning	Day schools/ discussion classes/ consultancy sessions/ tutorial clinics Printed materials Audio visual aids Library facilities ICT

Table 7 : Distribution of Media Use in BOU, IGNOU, and OUSL

BOU	IGNOU	OUSL
Printed Materials 85%	Printed Materials 85%	Printed Materials 85%
Audio Tape / Radio 8%	Audio Tape / Radio 5%	Audio Tape / Radio 5%
Video Tape / TV 7%	Video Tape / TV 10%	Video Tape / TV 10%

multimedia 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 staff. The student support system in BOU, in comparison to OUSL and IGNOU is the focus of the subsequent sections.

Instructional System and Educational Opportunity

The most common instructional system of the DTI studied is teacher inbuilt self-instructional printed materials (i.e. textbooks) and optional television and radio broadcast (Murphy, 1991b ; Murphy, 1996 ; Gunawardena, 1996 ; Demiray, 2002). The continuous assessment plays an important active role in the developing didactic communication. 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).

Technology-based Learner support depends on the type of technologies used in the ODL system and the facilities available that include live broadcasting through radio programmes, Telecast through TV and audio-video cassettes. Table 7 reveals that printed materials play a predominant 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 telecasting 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 staff. As Institution learning-teaching is expensive and timebound, self-learning should be encouraged which can be certified later by the Assessment of Prior Learning (APL). It is expected that in the days to come, the BOU academic staff are now more involved in producing TV programmes. The authorities of BOU are in the anvil of increasing the Telecasting time. In addition, in order to overcome the Telecasting drawbacks like sound distortion, the authorities also trying to provide the facility of audio-video cassettes to the distance learners.

Library Facilities and Learners' Access to Opportunity

The intention of ODL is to provide parallel/simultaneous learning for the deprived group of the society facilitating the process for dual degrees. It also paves opportunity to the Conventional Education System (CES) learners to study through the distance mode as in the case of the Convergence Scheme of IGNOU. According to Srinivasan et al (2008) the Convergence Scheme of IGNOU envisages

a seamless transaction between the Face-to-face education and the distance education system in India opening avenues for availing interdisciplinary education suitable for multiskill tasks in the employment sector.

Certification of the skilled learners through the Associate Degree Programme in vogue for the Community College Scheme of IGNOU. According to Kumar and Dorothy (2009) Community Colleges Scheme of IGNOU can facilitate equity, access and excellence in education and further throw open the ivory towers to a larger audience than it has done till now besides assuring about the quality of the learning environment in the Community Colleges. All the efforts for continuing education through the distance mode lead to the enhancement of the resource pool culminating in the effort to produce an skilled educated population, which will be self-reliant to face the work 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 (Ogunsola, 2004). The distance learners can be informed and knowledgeable about atleast the world of the programme of study 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, but 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). Of late IGNOU has been magnamously in putting all the Study material content on the website for free access which help in knowledge gaining for every one who want to access.

All three universities provide library facilities for teachers, support staff, administration, and research students at the headquarters and not at the regional resource centres or tutorial centres. Additionally IGNOU and OUSL provide library facilities

for their staff, the academic counsellors, coordinators, and students at the regional resource centres (RRC), and for students also at the study centres (SC). But BOU does not provide library facilities at the RRC or tutorial/study centres.

It can be understood 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 staff and learners. Learners of OUSL and IGNOU have access to library at regional and study centre only. In contrast, library facilities are available only for university staff in BOU, for example, teachers, and administration staff at headquarters. Any research student from other institutions can use the BOU library after availing the permission from the authority. There is no access to library facilities for the learners of BOU at headquarter and RRCs, which is really undesirable. Learners 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 SC levels and it should be ensured that learners 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 counselling for their learners, such as :

(1) *Academic counselling :*

Academic counsellors help the learners in giving academic advice in the subject of study mainly in the study centers. At times the empathy of the Academic Counsellor overflowingly manifested in the academic transactions help to solve personal problems that hinder the academic activity with the fear of dropping out.

(2) *Intensive mobile academic counselling :*

IGNOU arranges intensive mobile academic counselling since regular counselling is difficult for its low enrolment 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 learners at previously informed place and conducts counselling session during fixed hours.

According to Kumar & Dorothy (2010) the use of media in education has been undisputedly proved. Suiting the instructional style of the Distance Educational Institution (DEI), media is either supplementing or complementing the printed Self-Instructional Material (SIM). To bridge the gap between the institution and the learners through instant respond to their academic and administrative queries; and to meet the learners emerging need of information, IGNOU has attached fast tract live relays comprising the broadcast, telecast and webcast of which the broadcast of interactive radio counselling is gaining momentum after the introduction of the FM Channel. 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. Academic Counselling through Technology-based and face-to-face mode at IGNOU indicates that the academic counselling system had reached the state of the art stage compared to the other developed Open Universities standards.

Though OUSL counselling system is not as developed as that of the IGNOU, but it has the provision of academic counselling. Academic staff in each of the faculties are available for general learners counselling on academic matters. Learners 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. Thus, both academic and administrative issues related to the programme of the study is ensured and facilitated for the learner to complete the programme of study enrolled successfully.

In order to meet the emerging need for dissemination of information to the learners, BOU has a counselling and guidance cell

located in the main campus. The staff of this section help the learners, 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 learners providing faculty based face to face counselling and internet based learning and counselling. In considering demand of the learners, BOU has taken a new project for academic counseling, which offers short message service (SMS) classroom by using the mobile telephony services. 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 IGNOU 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 education through the distance mode from secondary to higher levels. This paper 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 learners 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 learners (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 learners, 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 staff 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 staff the professional development of the staff.

2. Although BOU has the one-way technologies of radio, and television broadcasting along with textbooks, but there are some drawbacks of these educational transmission systems, such as suitability, accessibility and the production cost of the radio broadcasts and television Telecast. 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 SCs 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, SC and TC levels maintaining point of quantity and quality. For science learners, BOU also needs to ensure the laboratory facilities to work in the RRCs or SCs like IGNOU and OUSL with adequate laboratory equipments. At the same time learners 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 SCs of BOU. However, the tutors should familiarise with the concept of open and distance learning providing effective tutor training by the BOU teaching staff.
5. The academics of BOU should arrange faculty/schools based counselling. Faculty staff can provide counselling at RRC, SC 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.

4. CONCLUSIONS :

A comparative study of the information about the BOU, IGNOU and OUSL has been done highlighting the similarities and the contrasts with the suggestion for the usage in day-to-day life for BOU. 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 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 building the human resource leading to progressive development for 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, for skilled worker, upgrading immigrant worker, employment without dislocation 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 learners' access to laboratory, library and ICT (i.e. the 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 still largely depends on traditional instructional process

due to the 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 learners 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 near 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 needs of 21st century and the learners at that time.

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