

Study on Learners' Support Services of CEMBA/CEMPA Programme at the Bangladesh Open University

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1 INTRODUCTION

Post-graduate education at a distance celebrated the 12th year of the Commonwealth Master of Business Administration and Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) Program at time when graduate business programmes have been receiving accolades from a diverse set of a constituents: learners, faculty members, distance educational institutions, corporations, industries and even policy-makers. The Bangladesh Open University (BOU), established in 1992, runs programs through open and distance learning (ODL) mode where use of ICT is minimal. The dynamics of globalization, plus the introduction of ICT, resulted in a tidal wave of information that has resulted radical changes in the educational needs of individuals and society at large, and is reflected in the emerging need for additional specializations in learning. Because the world of work is more complex and fluid, newer approaches to working and learning are in demand; and more than ever before, educational institutions are required to imbue their students with functional lifelong learning (L3) skills they need to survive and meet the changes of the 21st century. Bangladesh Open University (BOU), is gaining acceptance through a wide variety of distance education programmes represents an excellent tool to reach underserved populations and by which potential learners will be able to extends learning opportunities to people across the country of the twenty-first century with 23 formal and 19 non-formal education (NFE) programmes from its 6 academic schools near about 3,8 million learners have been enrolled (BOU Diary, 2012). The School of Business (SoB) of BOU has been running the CEMBA/CEMPA programme in association of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) for the executives and business professionals from 2002 to meet the growing demand for post-graduate human resource training in South Asia. Since the inception of the programme the School facing challenges of quality learning support services (LSS) for the programme. In simple words Learner' support system can be defined as "all activities beyond the production and delivery of course materials that assist in the progress of the learners in their studies". Garrison & Baynton, 1987) define LSS as the resources that learners can access to carry out the learning processes and in distance education support is concerned with a range of human and non-human resources to guide and facilitate the educational transaction (Garrison, 1989). LSS is particularly important in DE because many distance learners perhaps for the first time, are now "faced with a new learning environment and the expectation that they will have independent learning skills and the capacity to engage in activities that require self direction and self management of learning" (McLoughlin & Marshall, 2000). In a learner support system "a greater emphasis on more focused learner support could have the more lasting impact on retention rates if approached in a holistic manner and integrated fully into the learning process" (Mills, 2003). So this article begins with an introduction that contains some general definitions of learners support system. There is certainly a useful discussion to be had about all aspects of student support provided by the BOU, but this would be beyond the scope of this paper, which will be limited mainly to academic implications of learners support services provided by the School of Business (SOB), of BOU.

2 OBJECTIVES

Research that systematically reviews the learner's support needs from the learner's point of view is scarce (Potter, 1998; Reid, 1995). This study aims to fill this gap and investigated the current state of learner support services at the SOB from the learners' perspective. The purpose of this research study is to overview an idea about CEMBA/CEMPA programme and examines and identifies learner support service needs and preferences of distance learners studying at the SOB. In order to fulfill this purpose, the following research questions were formulated to guide the researcher in answering the broad research questions of Learners' Support Services of CEMBA/CEMPA Programme at the BOU. The presentation is concluded with the discussion and conclusions of the survey. The research question formulated to guide this study was as follows:

- What are the level of satisfaction of SOB learners about the importance and accessibility of learner support services that they receive?
- At which stages of the distance learning process do CEMBA/CEMPA students need support most? And what particular services do they need?

- What suggestions do CEMBA/CEMPA students make about improving the existing learner support services at SOB?

3 METHODOLOGY

The sample size of 100 was drawn from students who registered for CEMBA/CEMPA postgraduate at the Dhaka study centre (DSC) and Chittagong Study Centre (CSC). A structured questionnaire was used by the researcher to gather the required information. Qualitative data obtained through the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS version 16.0 and MS Excel. A 5 item Likert-type scale was designed to measure those learners academic support services in distance learning students support services provided by BOU. Each questionnaire was designed using Likert scale questions (Highly satisfied, satisfied, moderately satisfied, slightly satisfied and least satisfied etc.) with some free response questions and respondents, were 87 percent. Open-ended question was administered face-to-face to the distance learners before and after the tutorial sessions by the researcher to allow participants to comment on factors that are most assistive and most impeding in their distance learning experience, and also to allow participants to offer suggestions and recommendations improving the existing learners' support services offered by the School of Business of BOU.

4 CEMBA/CEMPA PROGRAMME

The CEMBA/CEMPA Programme is the outcome of collaboration between the COL and four open universities in South Asia: BOU, Indira Gandhi National Open University (India), the Open University of Sri Lanka and Allama Iqbal Open University (Pakistan). Launching in 2002, the CEMBA/CEMPA Programme is now expanding through partnership with universities in Asia, Africa, the South Pacific and South America. Several other universities Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (Ghana), National Open University of Nigeria (Nigeria), Open University of Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka), University College of the Caribbean (Jamaica), University of Guyana (Guyana), University of Papua New Guinea (Papua New Guinea), Wawasan Open University (Malaysia), Open University of Mauritius, (Mauritius). India's Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), which was a founding and contributing member of the CEMBA/CEMPA consortium of partner institutions, is currently not participating as a consortium member until further notice. The COL CEMBA and CEMPA Programmes benefit from the oversight and Direction of two governing bodies: an Executive Governing Board and an Academic Board. The governing board's goal is to design and deliver high quality learning and professional development opportunities for participating partner universities and their students to meet the demand for post-graduate management and public administration education. The objectives of the CEMBA / CEMPA Programme are: to enable students in the Commonwealth countries where the Programme is offered to obtain Master degrees in the areas of Business Administration and Public Administration, contributing to their professional growth and career advancement and to their countries' development; to develop human resources in various aspects of the areas noted above; and to develop quality post-graduate programmes that can be implemented widely in Commonwealth countries and can be recognized across the Commonwealth.

4.1 Program structure

Designed for part time study by busy working professionals, students are given a chance to seek self enrichment and advancement at their own time, place and pace. The features of this program are : A flexible learning system ,Affordable fees ,High quality curriculum developed by subject experts from universities in Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, India and Canada, Each partner universities provides learner support through tutors and local study centers, Intermediate exit points and awards (diploma, graduate diploma, graduate degree),Localized learning materials, recourses , and case studies are provided by each partner institutions to supplement learning, Support of specially designed TV programmes, Credit transfer between participating universities relating to this programme, Medium of Instruction is English. There are four stages of study modules in the programme – core courses, specialist compulsory courses, elective courses and those required courses for the graduate degree.

5 ANALYSIS AND RESULTLS

5.1 Enrolment and completion trend

The following figure 1 depicts the total number of students enrolled and completed CEMBA\CEMPA program since it has been launched.

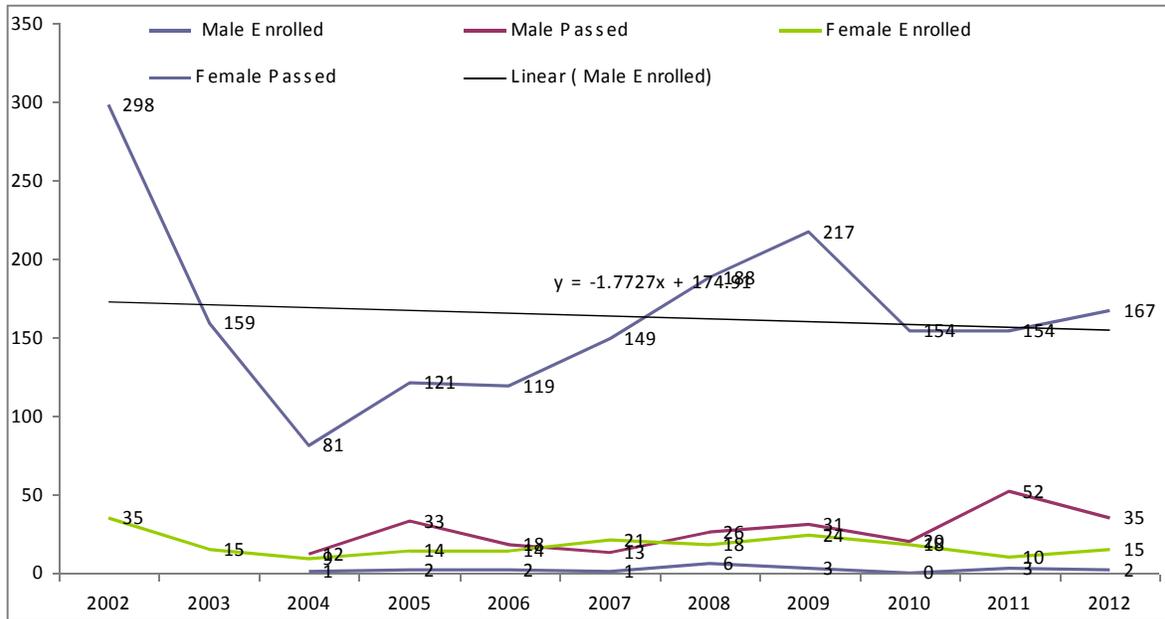


Fig 1: Enrolment and completion trend

Total number of learners enrolled in the program from 2002-2012 were 1807 (Figure-1) and Graduate were from 2004 to 2012 are only 240. Interestingly there was no enrollment in CEMPA program before 2012 and no graduate till 2012. Overall enrollment trend during the last twelve years have shown upward and downward trend having in some years very slow steady upward trend. In the Figure the highest enrollment was in the year 2002 and the lowest in 2004 have been noticed. Same sort of upward and downward trend has been shown in Figure 1, regarding the Graduates having highest graduates in the year 2011 and the lowest in 2004. The female enrollment in case of CEMBA program in very insignificant having only 193 out of 1807, which is in percentage form only 10.61% since the program has been launched. There were only 10 male learners enrolled in CEMPA program in the year 2012 having no female enrollment till 2012. The percentage of graduate as compared to enrollment is very insignificant which stands at 12.91% in both the program since it has been launched by the school of business of BOU.

Table 1 shows the statement-by-statement percentage analysis of the eighty seven learners together with their Median, Mode, and Skewness to elicit satisfaction towards the learners support services of CEMBA\CEMPA program.

Table 1: Satisfaction and Assessment of Learners Support Services

Questions relating to aspects of the Learners, Satisfaction(N=87)	Frequency distribution of Responses					Median	Mode	Skewness
	Highly Satisfied *	Satisfied *	Moderately Satisfied *	Slightly Satisfied*	Least Satisfied*			
1. Relevant study materials are supplied at the beginning of the Semester	35 (40.2)	22 (25.3)	20 (23.0)	5 (5.7)	5 (5.7)	4.00	5	-0.871
2. Study Materials helps to gain factual knowledge, principles, practical knowledge	12 (13.8)	32 (36.8)	19 (21.8)	20 (23.0)	4 (4.6)	4.00	4	-0.259
3. Information provided in Prospectus was useful	12 (13.8)	15 (17.2)	32 (36.8)	21 (24.1)	7 (8.0)	3.00	3	0.149
4. Curriculum are logically structured to helps to gain practical application	13 (14.9)	10 (11.5)	11 (12.6)	26 (29.9)	27 (31.0)	2.00	1	.609
5. Tutors are punctual ,displayed interest in the subject matter	8 (9.2)	9 (10.3)	22 (25.3)	12 (13.8)	36 (41.4)	2.00	1	.577
6. Semester Calendar provide useful information about media program, tutorial classes, course registration, examinations, re take etc.	25 (28.7)	21 (24.1)	14 (16.1)	12 (13.8)	15 (17.2)	4.00	5	-.373
7. Motivate learners to build self confidence	16 (18.4)	17 (19.5)	13 (14.9)	24 (27.6)	17 (19.5)	3	2	0.162
8. Motivate Communication skills for feedback with tutors and fellow learners	15 (17.2)	24 (27.6)	18 (20.7)	23 (26.4)	7 (8.0)	3	4	-0.081
9. Tutors accept regular advice, criticism, and divergent opinion.	14 (16.1)	20 (23.0)	13 (14.9)	20 (23.0)	20 (23.0)	3	1	0.100
10. Learners timely, promptly responses motivate communication	7 (8.0)	14 (16.1)	20 (23.0)	17 (19.5)	29 (33.3)	2	1	0.400
11. Study centre coordinator provide regular advice, encourage continuing the program	29 (33.3)	17 (19.5)	18 (20.7)	17 (19.5)	6 (6.9)	4	5	-0.344
12. SC Helps on admission/registration. handling problems, queries	10 (11.5)	29 (33.3)	16 (18.4)	15 (17.2)	17 (19.5)	3	4	-0.213
13. Semester and Examination management, publication of results are efficient, queries, of learners \ tutors	19 (21.8)	23 (26.4)	26 (29.9)	15 (17.2)	4 (4.6)	3	3	-0.219
14. Study center personnel are prompt, efficient in handling problems/ queries of learners/Tutors	10 (11.5)	15 (17.2)	18 (20.7)	32 (36.8)	12 (13.8)	2	2	0.399
15. Teachers of SOB visit study centers to accept, regular advice, criticism, learners opinion.	4 (4.6)	9 (10.3)	18 (20.7)	18 (20.7)	38 (43.7)	2	1	0.772

*Parenthesis means % distribution of response

Table 1 shows items regarding learners' satisfaction with learner support services which were arranged into 15 statements for the purpose of this study. The highest score on the scale "Highly satisfied" and "satisfied" indicated higher level of satisfaction about the support service provided to the learners. As indicated in Table 1, majority of the respondents satisfied with statement 1-(65.5%), 2-(50.6%), 6-(52.8%), 11-(52.8%). However majority learners expressed their dissatisfaction with statement 4-(60.9%), 5-(55.2%), 10-(52.8%), 15-(64.4%). In case of rest of the statements respondents rated their responses in moderately satisfied level with regard to the statements 3, 7,8,9,12,13, and 14. Interpreting the results in terms of Median and mode Table 1 indicated that most of the learners satisfied with the statements 1,2,3,6,7,8,11,12 and 13. On the contrary, learners were least satisfied with the statement 4, 5, 9, 10, 14, and 15. In the Table 1, statement 1,2,6,8,11,12,13 showed negative number of skewness, which means that the distribution is positively skewed (Right-tailed), which also means that most values are concentrated on the left of the Mean, that is, the Mean is larger than the Median. On the other hand, Statement 3,4,5,7,9,10,14,15 showed positive number of skewness, which means that the distribution is negatively skewed (left-tailed), which also means

that most values are concentrated on the right of the Mean, that is, the Mean is smaller than the Median.

Table 2: Academic Correlation

		Relevant study materials are supplied at the beginning of the Semester	Study Materials helps to gain factual knowledge, principles, practical knowledge	Curriculum are logically structured to helps to gain practical application	Tutors are punctual ,displayed interest in the subject matter	Motivate learners to build self confidence	Motivate Communication skills for feedback with tutors and fellow learners	Tutors accept regular advice, criticism, and divergent opinion.	Learners timely, promptly responses motivate communication.
Relevant study materials are supplied at the beginning of the Semester	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.020	-.090	-.450**	.190	-.306**	.000	-.092
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.853	.406	.000	.077	.004	.997	.395
Study Materials helps to gain factual knowledge, principles, practical knowledge	Correlation Coefficient	.020	1.000	-.291**	-.396**	.145	.011	-.317**	-.185
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.853	.	.006	.000	.180	.922	.003	.087
Curriculum are logically structured to helps to gain practical application	Correlation Coefficient	-.090	-.291**	1.000	-.222*	.014	.135	.140	.097
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.406	.006	.	.038	.898	.212	.197	.370
Tutors are punctual ,displayed interest in the subject matter	Correlation Coefficient	-.450**	-.396**	-.222*	1.000	-.151	.040	.303**	.091
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.038	.	.162	.715	.004	.404
Motivate learners to build self confidence	Correlation Coefficient	.190	.145	.014	-.151	1.000	-.269*	-.063	-.433**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.077	.180	.898	.162	.	.012	.562	.000
Motivate Communication skills for feedback with tutors and fellow learners	Correlation Coefficient	-.306**	.011	.135	.040	-.269*	1.000	-.126	.306**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.922	.212	.715	.012	.	.246	.004
Tutors accept regular advice, criticism, divergent opinion.	Correlation Coefficient	.000	-.317**	.140	.303**	-.063	-.126	1.000	-.007
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.997	.003	.197	.004	.562	.246	.	.949
Learners timely, promptly responses motivate communication	Correlation Coefficient	-.092	-.185	.097	.091	-.433**	.306**	-.007	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.395	.087	.370	.404	.000	.004	.949	.

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 stated that the correlation between study materials are supplied at the beginning of the Semester and Tutors are punctual, displayed interest in the subject matter was examined using a Spearman's rho correlation coefficient test (r). The result shows there was a significant but medium and negative correlation between two statement of the respondents (r = -0.450 and p = 0.0001). The correlation between Tutors are punctual ,displayed interest in the subject matter and Tutors accept regular advice, criticism, and divergent opinion shows there was a significant positive correlation between two statements of the respondents (r = 0.303 and p=0.004). Moreover, there was little and negative

correlation between the statement of Motivate learners to build self-confidence and Motivate Communication skills for feedback with tutors and fellow learners ($r = -0.269$ and $p=0.012$). The correlation between Curriculum are logically structured to helps to gain practical application and Motivate learners to build self confidence shows little but positive correlation between the two statements of the respondents ($r = 0.014$ and $p=0.0898$). Further analyses shows in Table 2 that eight statements those have been considered as Academic Correlation for the purpose of this study noticed some little, low, medium but positive and negative correlation.

Table 3: Motivate and Administrative Correlation

Statement	n=87	Information provided in the Prospectus was useful	Semester Calendar provide useful information about media program,tutorial classes, course registration, examinations, re take etc.	Study centre coordinator pprovide regular advice,encourage e continuing the program	Helps on admission/regi stration. handling problems, queries	Semester end Examination management ,publication of results are efficient, queries, of students\ tutors	Study center personnel are prompt,efficient in handling problems/ queries of learners/Tutors	Teachers of SOB visit study centres to accept,regular advice,criticism, learners opinion.
Information provided in the Prospectus was useful	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000 .	.052 .634	.228* .033	.280** .009	-.131 .226	-.008 .941	-.006 .957
Semester Calendar provide useful information about media program,tutorial classes, course registration, examinations, re take etc.	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	.052 .634	1.000 .	.184 .088	.377** .000	-.106 .329	-.313** .003	-.310** .003
Study centre coordinator pprovide regular advice,encourage continuing the program	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	.228* .033	.184 .088	1.000 .	.549** .000	-.463** .000	-.401** .000	-.343** .001
Helps on admission/registration. handling problems, queries	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	.280** .009	.377** .000	.549** .000	1.000 .	-.257* .016	-.503** .000	-.384** .000
Semester end Examination management ,publication of results are efficient, queries, of students\ tutors	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	-.131 .226	-.106 .329	-.463** .000	-.257* .016	1.000 .	.074 .496	-.049 .654
Study center personnel are prompt,efficient in handling problems/ queries of learners/Tutors	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	-.008 .941	-.313** .003	-.401** .000	-.503** .000	.074 .496	1.000 .	.204 .059
Teachers of SOB visit study centres to accept,regular advice,criticism,learners opinion.	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	-.006 .957	-.310** .003	-.343** .001	-.384** .000	-.049 .654	.204 .059	1.000 .

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 showed that the correlation between Semester Calendar provide useful information about media program, tutorial classes, course registration, examinations, re take etc. and Helps on admission/registration. Handling problems, queries was examined using a Spearman's rho correlation coefficient test (r). The result shows there was a significant positive correlation between the two statements of the respondents ($r = 0.280$ and $p=0.009$). The correlation between Study centre coordinator provide regular advice, encourage continuing the program and RRC personnel are prompt, efficient in handling problems/ queries of learners/Tutors shows high and negative correlation between the two statements ($r = -0.401$ and $p=0.0001$). Again Teachers of SOB visit study centers to accept, regular advice,criticism,learners opinion, and Study centre coordinator provide regular advice, encourage continuing the program shows there was a significant but medium and negative correlation between the two statements of the respondents ($r = -0.343$ and $p=0.0001$). Other statements mentioned in the Table 3, have shown some cases negative and positive correlation between the statements in order to motivate and administrative correlation.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings of this study provide considerable insight into the learners' support services. Study reveals that effective learning support is in place that contributes the learning process as the study centers are able to achieve learning experience for the learners. This study has demonstrated several areas of support services that need improvements in order to support learners effectively in their learning process. The study suggests that most learners are satisfied with the delivery of materials, counseling and guidance at the centre (statements 1, 2, 6 and 11) and also moderately satisfied with handling with queries, feedback on assignments, and social role of the tutor (statement 3, 7, 8,9,12,13, and 14). In addition, there are dissatisfactions with course curriculum, tutors academic roles, prompt response in any queries,etc (statement 4, 5, and 10 etc).Interestingly respondents showed their dissatisfaction about the faculties visit to study centers to accept, advice ,criticism about learners opinion even though there is a study centre coordinator available for this purpose. In this situation, the SOB should introduce ICT as a tool to enhance learners' supports for the programme and the adaptability if the ICT-enabled services will be of feasible as most of the learners have computer access as they are executives form government and corporate sectors and they also deserve high standard support services. In addition, the SOB should make the learning materials available online so that they can get access any time and that should contain more case studies. Expect the use of ICT and case studies, the learners are happy with the support services that mean the tutors who usually conduct tutorials are of high quality and their academic role, administrative role and social role at the TC have been assessed as excellent. BOU has been the champions in providing the LSS for the CEMBA|CEMPA among the partner universities and with the apex body of the programme provider that is the COL. High standard learning support services created a demand for the programme and it has been a niche to commercially run MBA programmes by the private universities in Bangladesh (SOB, 2011).

The study comes out with some recommendations and they are: tutors are to be trained with the case study method as the programme is termed as professional degree where practical case analysis is the integral role of their academic activities rather than marginal role of the other BOU programmes; blended approach with sufficient computer-mediated learning facilities are required as most of the learners do have computers either in office or in residence; and finally, there should be a learning network so that they can have the opportunity for better learning environment. In addition, there should be a research group consisting from the partner universities to study the different aspects of the programme and they are the quality of self-learning materials (SLMs) and radio-TV broadcasts. Sharing of materials has been the beauty of the Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) Programme; at the same time this has been the problem because same materials are used in different nations.

The Bangladesh economy is much better that 10 years back and more females are in the different executive positions; in spite of that the female learners are very insignificant with compared to the male in the programme. In order to address this issue the SOB should think of it and do positive campaigns with in NGOs, government offices, corporations, disciplined forces such as army, police and also in the chamber of commerce with providing particular facilities to the female learners. Special scholarship scheme may be arranged for the female learners in association with the COL.

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