

Use of Media and Technologies in Open and Distance Education: A Case of Bangladesh Open University

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ABSTRACT

A communications network has become an essential tool in today's educational environment. Open and distance education is getting more dependent on information and communication technology (ICT) than ever before. Bangladesh Open University (BOU), the only distance education provider in Bangladesh, has been trying to adopt the use of various media and technologies for its distance education. It has adopted a teaching learning system based on a combination of print and non print media. BOU has not yet adopted computing media (e. g. Internet, on-line technologies) for teaching because of resource constraint and poor access. It uses ranges of media, such as print, audio, video and human interaction. TV is a powerful educational tool for the learners of Bangladesh Open University. As on of the non-print media BOU aims to advance and disseminate knowledge by television broadcasts to the various sections of the population with a wider access to higher education. However, the real strength of television is its unique teaching features and its ability to improve learning efficiency. This paper aims to reveal the effectiveness of the use of media in open and distance learning system on the basis of a survey on the students of Bangladesh Open University and to suggest remedial measures to be undertaken to make the TV program more effective for BOU students.

Keywords: Media, technology, TV, distance learning, Bangladesh Open University (BOU)

INTRODUCTION

In open and distance education different types of media and technologies are used to transfer education to the learners. Rumble (1986,1994) said that four media namely print, audio, television computer are available for teaching purposes, in one technological form or another. A medium is a generic form of communication associated with particular ways of presenting knowledge. According to Prof. Bates (1993,1995) there are five important media in education: direct human contract (face to face), text (including still graphics), audio, television and computing. The use of each media gives both variety and the chance of accommodating different learning styles. He goes on to argue that it is better to use a limited range of technologies in order to reduce redundancy and wasteful expenditure; provided all the main media are covered. One medium may serve a teaching function better than another in a particular area. There are a number of

factors that need to be taken into consideration before deciding on the appropriate use of media and technology. Siddique (1987) stated that selection of appropriate media for a learning package is a complex decision influenced by a variety of considerations, such as the specific learning objectives of the unit, the nature of subject matter, learner's, background and experiences and the characteristics of the target group as well as practical constraints including availability of infrastructure and financial resources.

Bangladesh Open University uses different media and technology to extend education to every community, even to the most remote rural areas, thereby contributing to the alleviation of poverty. The present study examines the effective use of media and technology in open and distance learning system on the basis of survey on the students of BA/BSS program of the School of Social Science, Humanities and Language of Bangladesh Open University. And to suggest remedial measures to be undertaken to make the TV programs more effective for BOU learners.

MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY USE AT BOU

Bangladesh Open University is using print, television, radio, audio cassettes and face- to- face tuition to teach its students. Print is the core of medium of instruction in BOU. It has not adopted computing media and technologies for teaching, for obvious reasons for cost and poor access, but it has adopted a spectrum of four of the five media, and makes use of four technologies (Table -1).

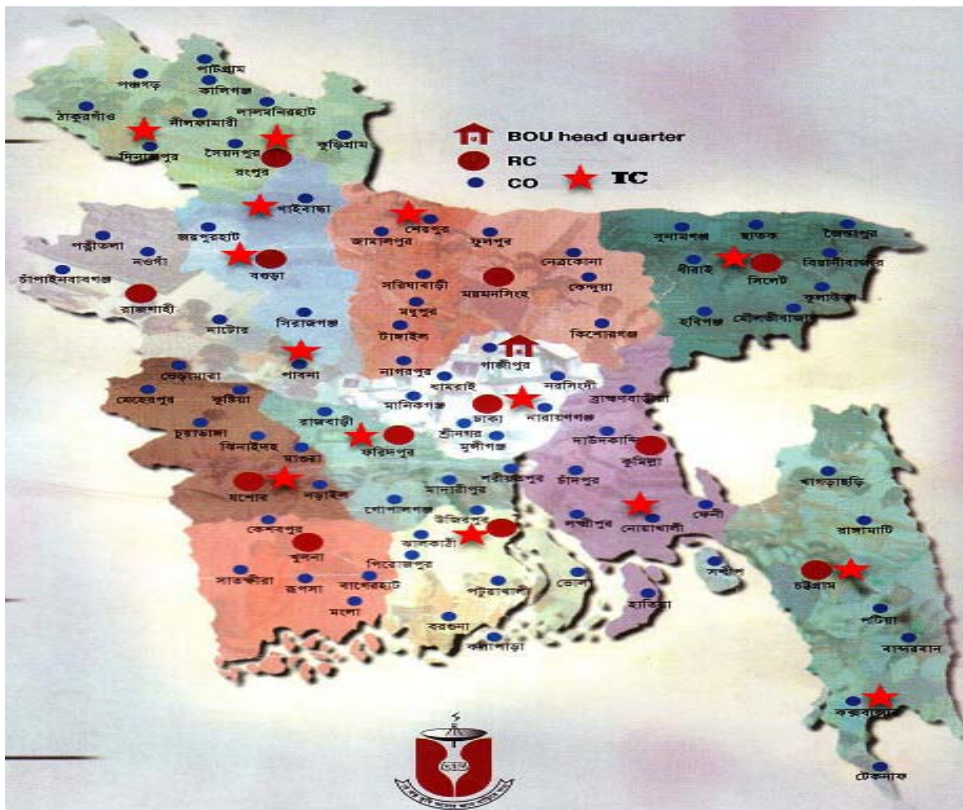
Table 1: BOU media and technologies

Media	Technologies	On-way Technology applications	Two-wayTechnology applications
Direct Human Contact	Over-head projector		Lectures/Seminars/Telecommunication
Text	Print	Text and other supporting printed materials	
Audio	Radio-broadcasting Audio Cassettes	Radio Programs Cassettes Programs	
Television	Tele-Broadcasting	Telecast Programs	

The table indicates that the technology-based media is very important for distance learners. The appropriate use of media and technology has provided information access to all students in remote, rural and urban areas as well as across nations. BOU provides chiefly through face-to-face contact, though there are other ways, using two-way as opposed to one-way media. While the actual range of media used by BOU makes considerable sense pedagogically in terms of the relative costs and accessibility of the media.

BANGLADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY

Bangladesh Open University, the only national distance learning University in the country, was established in 1992. Bangladesh Open University has opened a new horizon for the vast majority, who for various reasons has to drop out of the conventional system of education and have been yearning for opportunities of education. Prime objective of BOU is to transform the country's vast human resources into an educated and trained workforce by extending to them a wide range of academic programs both formal and non-formal. BOU has 7 academic schools namely: School of Agriculture and Rural Development, School of Science and Technology, School of Social Science, Humanities and Language, School of Education, School of Business, School of Law and Open School. It has already launched 21 formal and 19 non-formal programs having an enrollment of 3,50,000 (approximately) students. Formal programs include master degrees, bachelor degrees, postgraduate diploma and certificate programs, for the open and distance learners. Non-formal programs are designed to make the people aware as to how to live a better life. These are community based programs and are intended for the people who are who are willing to improve the level of their knowledge and understanding about the environment and socio-cultural aspect of life in general. To reach the education to the door steps of the people 12 regional resource center (RRC) in major cities and 80 coordinating offices (CO) in small cities provide instruction and other support services such as learning materials.



Locations of BOU's main campus, regional centers (RC), coordinating offices (Cos)

The Role of Television in Distance Learning at BOU

Among all the available electronic media the television appear to be the most common and popular ones for the distance students to learn from and for the distance educators to impart education from a distance (IGNOU,1995). The TV programs help the learners to get the direction about how the courses should be dealt with and also explanations of the difficult concepts in the courses. Television has been accepted as one of the powerful mass media because of its audio-visual presentations. TV can communicate message to distance learners in a more natural and effective way than radio instructions. As a medium television can personalize the teaching, enabling the distant students to identify the individuality of the teacher and provide a public image of the university's presence in the community. Sing (1999) reported that broadcast television the most popular because it is the most accessible and most effective telecom technique.

Bangladesh Open University has been making successful use of the TV as a powerful educational tool for the distance education in Bangladesh. BOU transmits 60 minutes of TV programs five days a week broadcasts daily. All schools of the University share these times. Hence, on average, each school has one day per week for its programs. Bangladesh Television

(BTV) the public media network broadcasts on a single channel, which covers 98 percent of the total population area. Some of areas of the country not covered, notably the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

PROFILE OF SAMPLES

The survey was conducted on a sample of the students of BA/BSS program of the School of Social Science, Humanities and Language of BOU. The structured questionnaire were provided to the students and collected in different tutorial centers (TC). A small of students were directly interviewed. The questionnaire were distributed among 170 students in four regional resource centers (RRC) such as Dhaka, Barisal, Comilla and Mymensingh of BOU, but only 100 questionnaire were received back which were filled up by the sample students. The proportion of male and female of the students of the program was 73.75 percent and 26.25 percent respectively.

Table-2: Students preference for the day and time of TV broadcasts

a) Day of week		Percentage
Friday	Holiday	52
Saturday		
Sunday		13
Monday		8
Tuesday		6
Wednesday		7
Thursday		14

b) Time	Percentage
7-- 9 AM	23
18--20 PM	26
20--22 PM	51

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study about the television programs of Bangladesh Open University are summarized below:

TV is a most powerful educational tool for Bangladesh Open University. The Survey report of students' opinion on the quality of BOU TV programs is good for self-study. TV sets were available to more than 86 percent of the students. The remaining 14 percent learners who did not own television watched TV program at their relatives and friends place. The School Social Science, Humanities and Language (SSHL) broadcasts TV program for BA/BSS students each Sunday between 7.30 and 8.30 AM. Most of the respondents (75 percent) appreciated TV programs broadcasts by BOU. They said the programs are suitable for their text materials. Discussion with students revealed that learners did not know the exact time schedule of broadcasting and topic of the programs and this had not watched TV. However, majority (51 percent) viewers express their opinion that the TV programs to be broadcasts on either Friday or Saturday between 20 and 22 PM. as the suitable time for effective and helpful in their pursuit of studies. The responding viewers identified some significant problems behind less effectiveness in the use of TV programs which were, unsuitable time Schedule, failure of electricity, family involvement etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings of this study suggest that to make the TV programs more effective for the learners BOU should be careful about the following things:

- The time span of BOU TV programs should be extended. As early as possible a separate satellite TV channel should be opened to broadcast its programs. This will reduce BOU dependency on the government own channel too.
- A topics-wise TV programs schedule must be sent to the students. It will be very helpful for BOU students if the said programs are broadcast after 8 pm so that learners can listen to the program and benefited. Broadcasting should be regular and followed by announcement of the topic for the next day broadcasting.
- The quality of presentation should be ensured. TV presentation must be attractive. In order to avoid monotony repetition of a single program several times should be stopped. Discussion should be on each critical topic of each course.

- Continuous talk of a single presenter may make the whole program boring to the learners. If the discussion could be arranged in the form of classroom interaction, the students would benefit more. Certainly attractive TV programs may relieve them from that boredom.
- The teachers of the concerned Schools should come forward to design and direct the TV programs in association with the media expert.
- In order to ensure the quality of education, the distance education institutions must be careful about the use of proper media and technologies. We have to think the uses of media and technology in regard to appropriateness and acceptability in the society as well as on the ability of the institution offering the program. The socio-economic and cultural background of a person influences their ability to learn from different media technology.
- However, no single medium can be effective for all kinds of learning needs. Effective combination of media and technology is necessary for assuring effectiveness of the open and distance learning system.
- Developing and designing media is a continuous process and involves more research, commitment, planning and evaluation. As accumulation of the new knowledge regarding media & technology are increasing very rapidly. While TV can be a powerful educational tool, its value is totally dependent on the quality of materials and the skill with which it is used. Therefore, BOU should give emphasis on research for development as well as to maintain the quality of media.

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