

ODL to Reinforce Gender Equity at Junior Secondary Level Education: Opportunities, Challenges and Strategies

Theme: Girls and Women Education

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is offering open schooling programmes at secondary and higher secondary levels. However, the girls who are dropped out in their primary schooling and in junior secondary level are still not included into the ODL process here. To include the dropout girls at junior secondary level, a joint initiative have been taken by BOU and COL. A nationwide baseline survey has already been conducted by BOU with the support from COL to identify the reasons behind their abstention from education and their specific educational needs. This paper presents the overall scenario of girls' education and the reasons behind the girls' dropout in the on-campus education system of Bangladesh. Finally, the potentials of ODL to include these dropout girls into education have been discussed categorically. The findings of the said baseline study have been used carefully in the paper to discuss the strategies for including the dropout girls into education.

Keywords: open schooling, female education, gender equality.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Bangladesh is a highly populated country with 14,97,72,364 (as on 15 March 2011, BBS) population, among them 7,49,80,386 [50.06%, BBS 2011) is male and 7,47,91,978, [49.94%] is female. Although, for a balanced and harmonious society, it is necessary to take both male and female in an advanced level of education, a large portion of female population cannot continue their education after a certain level. Females in Bangladesh have multiple roles in their daily life. So, after covering this multiple dimensions of responsibility, it is challenging for them to incorporate education in their daily routine. Also in developing countries, poverty, early marriage, lack of awareness, unconsciousness, economic, social, cultural and religious barriers, etc. are assumed liable for pulling the girls out from the stream of education. Due to poverty, the guardians are also not educated enough that they will be conscious especially for their girls' education. They think that it is more profitable for them to engage their girls in daily household or income generating works, rather than engaging them into education. As they see that

the opportunity cost of sending the girls to school is much high, they then decide to keep them off education.

Again at the primary level as their age is not sufficient for taking responsibilities in their families, primary enrollment rate is satisfactory. Moreover, government's initiative to reinforce female participation at primary level increased the girls enrolment in primary education significantly. In 2007-2010, the net enrolment ratio for female was 93% compared to 86% for male at primary level. However, the scenario of participation of females in secondary level education is just alarming. The net enrolment ratio for female in secondary schools in 2007-2010 was 43% only (UNICEF, 2011). From the report of BBS, it is found that female literacy rate is higher than that of male of age group 11-14 (Female: 74.4 and Male: 69.8, 2011) and female literacy rate is lower compared to male of age group 15-45 (Female: 47.9 and Male: 54.6, 2011). By keeping these females outside the orbit of education, the nation as a whole will be in a trap of gender inequality and the nation as a whole will suffer from slow economic progress. In these circumstances, open and distance education can be the best means for including the out-of-the-school females into education without hampering their daily life responsibilities.

BOU has launched open schooling programmes in 1995 with an aim to help the people, especially the dropout girls, have education in a flexible way. These programs are limited at secondary and higher secondary levels. However, the girls who are dropped out in their primary schooling and in junior secondary level are still not included into the ODL process. To include the dropout girls at junior secondary level, a joint initiative have been taken recently by BOU and COL and a baseline study has already been completed. Starting with a brief overview on the girls education in Bangladesh, the paper discusses the ODL practices in Bangladesh. Then paper presents the reasons behind the girl dropouts and the educational needs of the out-of-the-school girls as per the baseline survey. The paper also presents how OER can be adopted and shared to promote a cost-effective open schooling for the vulnerable poor girls. Finally, the use of ICT and the scope of collaboration with other open schools for increasing the access and inclusion of dropout girls into education have been carefully verified in the paper.

2. OBJECTIVES

The broad objective of the study was to formulate the strategies for using ODL to bring back the dropout girls inside the orbit of education.

The specific objectives of this study are –

- To identify the reasons behind the girl dropouts;
- To identify the specific educational needs of the dropout girls;
- To verify the scope of OER use and collaboration with other open schools to offer cost-effective and quality education at junior secondary level; and
- To investigate the scope of using ICTs in ODL to increase the access and inclusion of the dropout girls into education.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

In the analysis, both primary and secondary data have been used. For secondary data, database of SSS division and exam division of BOU, database of Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) and other online sources have been used. The findings of FGDs conducted recently by BOU (as a COL-BOU joint initiative) have also been used in the analysis. FGDs were conducted with the stakeholders, such as local elites, dropout girls and guardians. At twelve (12) Regional Resource Centers (RRC) of Bangladesh Open University, total of 36 FGDs were conducted.

Figure 2: FGD Areas

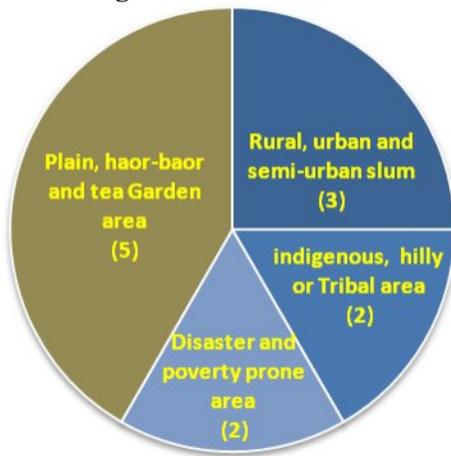
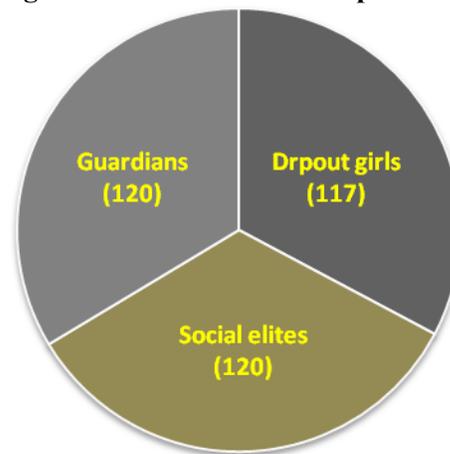


Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents



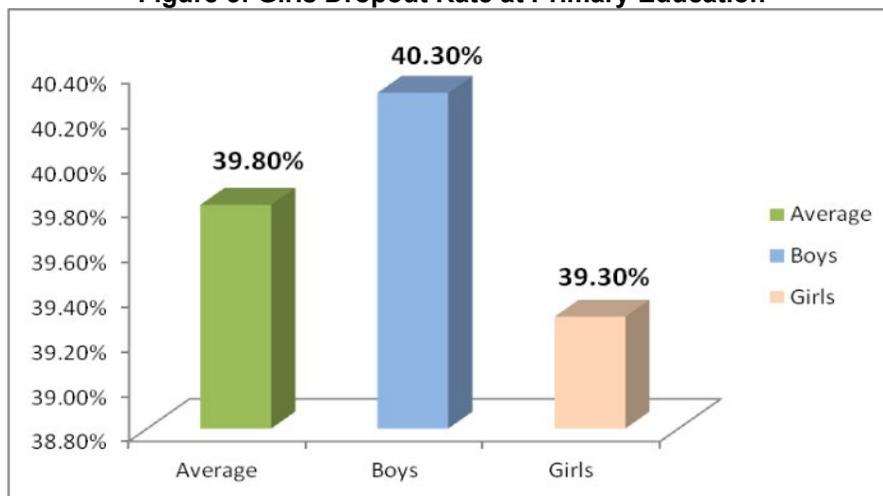
4. GIRLS EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

The overall on-campus education system offers basically three types of education such as general, madrasah and vocational at primary, secondary, higher secondary, undergraduate and graduate levels. The on-campus system in Bangladesh cannot retain all the school age population of the country. Among the enrolled population, almost 50% cannot continue their study due to a number of social, cultural and economic reasons. Although the girls' enrolment rate at primary level has been increased in recent years (97.63%, BANBEIS 2010), the rate was too worst even 2 decades ago. A huge number of female population thus remain outside education as they do not have access to on-campus system anymore due to their age and socio-economic conditions.

It can easily be observed from Figure-3 that not all the primary age population can have primary education. Although the female enrolment rate at primary level has increased to 94.9% in 2010 from 60.5% in 1990/91, still the dropout rate remains significantly high. The World Bank study (2005) on the MDG progress of Bangladesh revealed a positive correlation between enrolment rate and household living standards. The underlying logic may be the same in the case of high dropout rate as the poor face a high opportunity cost of sending their children to school. The study also found positive association

between consumption expenditure per capita and primary completion rate. This finding is consistent with the general perception that poverty in the family causes drop out in general.

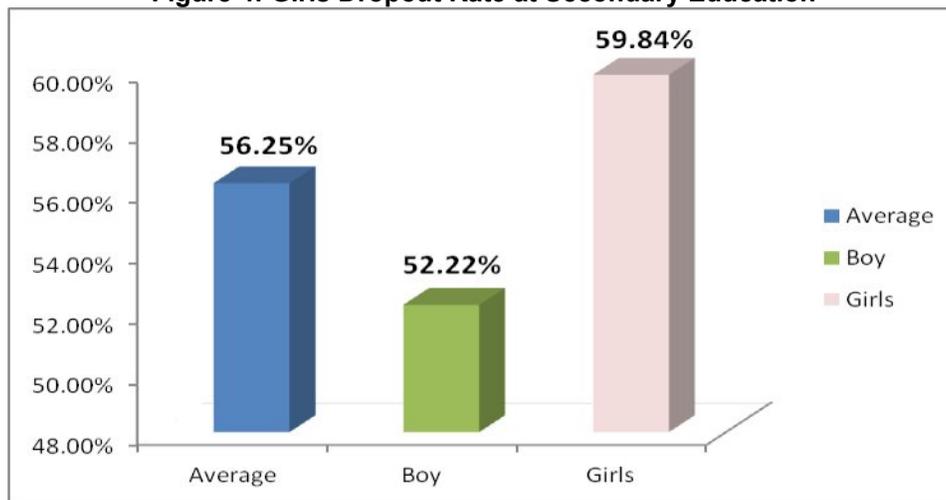
Figure 3: Girls Dropout Rate at Primary Education



Source: BANBEIS, 2010

Figure-4 shows that the girls dropout rate in the secondary school education programs is relatively high, even though some recent government interventions increased the girls enrolment rate. It can easily be observed that a large portion of the girls who started their education at primary level couldn't have reached the secondary education. And among the girls who enrolled into the secondary education programs, a large portion of them can not complete their education cycle.

Figure 4: Girls Dropout Rate at Secondary Education

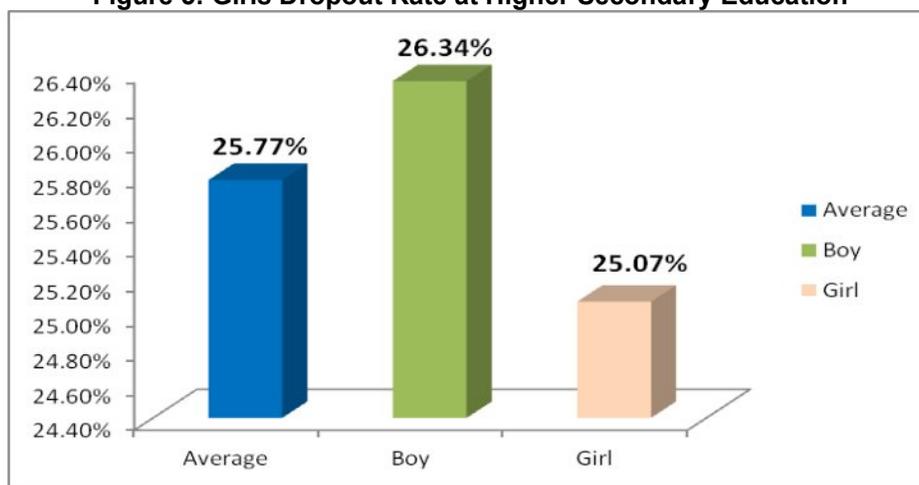


Source: BANBEIS, 2011

The aforementioned scenario is true at other levels of education too. Figure-5 shows the scenario of the higher secondary education. Due to the limited capacity of the on-campus system and the accompanied

socio-cultural and economic problems, a significant number of the female students cannot complete their higher secondary cycle education.

Figure 5: Girls Dropout Rate at Higher Secondary Education



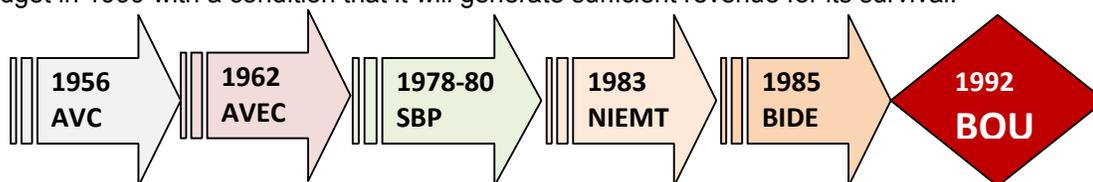
Source: BANBEIS, 2011

Therefore, the above mentioned facts provide an overall picture of the girl dropouts in different levels of on-campus education system in Bangladesh. It is clearly observed that the girl dropout rate is the highest in the secondary level education compared to other levels of education. Undoubtedly, in these circumstances, the ODL system got huge potentials to include the dropout girls into stream of education

5. ODL practices in Bangladesh

5.1. Evolution of ODL in Bangladesh

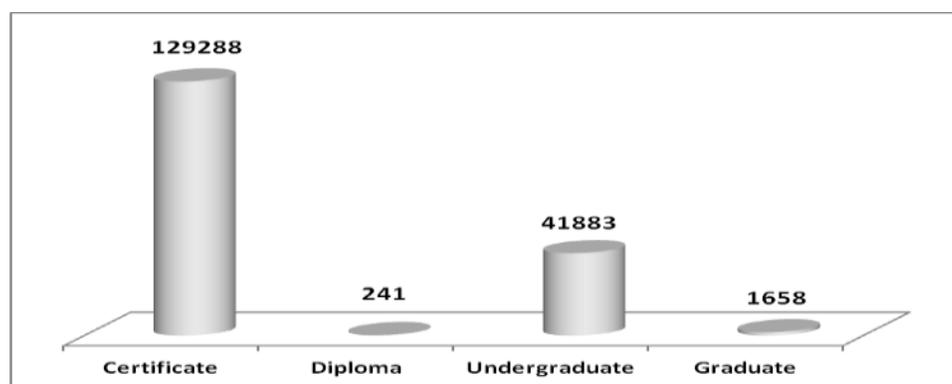
Distance education in Bangladesh started its journey in 1956. It began with distribution of 200 radio receivers throughout the country, which led to the creation of an Audio-Visual Cell (AVC) and later the Audio-Visual Education Centre (AVEC) in 1962. In 1978-1980, a pilot project entitled 'School Broadcasting Programme (SBP)' was undertaken. In 1983, the SBP and EVEC were merged to form National Institute of Educational Media and Technology (NIEMT). In 1995, Bangladesh Institute of Distance Education (BIDE) was established and NIEMT was incorporated into BIDE. In 1989, as per the request of the Government of Bangladesh, Asian Development Bank (ADB) sent a 'fact finding mission on open university' to Bangladesh. Then a feasibility study on open university has been conducted through a 'Technical assistance Project (TAP)' under the assistance of ADB. At the end, Bangladesh Open University (BOU) was established in 1992 by an Act passed in the Bangladesh National Parliament (BOU Act – 1992, No – 38). BIDE merged with it. BOU came under government budget in 1999 with a condition that it will generate sufficient revenue for its survival.



5.2. Bangladesh Open University

Bangladesh Open University offers 23 formal programs (March 2013) through six academic schools. The programs include certificate, diploma, undergraduate and graduate programs. Almost half of the programmes are undergraduate programmes, few are graduate programmes and others are certificate programmes. Certificate programs at secondary and higher secondary are the largest programs in terms of student enrolment (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Enrolment in BOU programs



Source: Exam division, BOU (2010)

6. Reasons behind the girl dropouts

From the focus group discussions (FGDs), a number of reasons have been identified as the major barriers for the girls to have education from on-campus education system. There reasons are of two types. One is socio-cultural and educational system itself and second one is the cost of education.

Table 1: Reasons behind girl dropouts

Sl.	Reasons	Perception of dropout girls	Perception of Guardians	Perception of the social elites
1.	Poverty	√	√	√
2.	High opportunity cost		√	
3.	Lack of Education and consciousness of parents	√	√	√
4.	High expenses		√	
5.	Early marriage due to the demand for more dowry for aged girls	√	√	√
6.	Disparity among male and girl children,	√		√
7.	Religious barrier	√		√
8.	Eve teasing	√	√	√
9.	Acid crime, road bulling		√	
10.	Distance of school	√		
11.	Costly, unavailable and insecure transport	√	√	√
	Lack of congenial environment in classes		√	
12.	Low proportion of female teachers	√		√
13.	Lack of secondary school in some	√		√

	underprivileged area			
14.	Unequal access and treatment to the girls of the lower caste	√		√
15.	Lack of social supports and initiatives of technical /job oriented education by both the GO and NGOs	√	√	√
16.	Very limited employment opportunity after conventional education	√	√	√

Table 1 shows that among the reasons behind girl dropouts from on-campus system poverty, parents' unawareness, early marriage, high opportunity cost, absence of vocational courses, etc are the dominant ones.

7. Expected steps for inclusion of the dropout girls

Although the girls are not able to keep themselves included in the on-campus education system for several unavoidable reasons, they are still very much interested to come back to education if an alternative system of education is available which accommodates the challenges they are facing. Table 2 summarizes the expectations and possible interventions for the inclusion of the dropout girls.

Table 2: Expected interventions for inclusion of girls

Expectations	Intervention type	Girl's opinion	Guardian's opinion	Elite group's opinion
Vocational training	• Training on tailoring and fashion: Block, Boutique, Sewing, Embroidery, etc	√	√	√
	• Small and Cottage Industry: Weaving, Handicrafts, Bag making, carpet, fan making, etc.	√	√	√
	• Beauty Parlor or Saloon	√	√	√
	• Farming: Nursing, Poultry, Livestock; Agro-based Training Courses;			√
	• IT: Computer Operation, Cell phone and Computer Repairing and servicing;	√		√
	• Industrial Training: Capacity Building/ Skill Upgrading in Garment Factory;	√		√
	• Technical: General Mechanics Training and Motor driving training;	√	√	√
	• Hotel Management: Training on cooking, culinary and areas of hotel management;	√		√
	• Other Areas: Audio-video Training, Painting and printing etc.	√	√	√
Area specific job opportunities	Areawise Job specific training	√	√	√
Enhancement of awareness	Social mobilization			√
	Parents literacy schooling		√	√
Supports for girls	Stipend	√	√	√
	Free study materials	√	√	

	Employment and loan opportunity after vocational training	√	√	√
Gender needs	Gender balance in tutoring	√	√	√
	Gender balance in learner support services	√	√	√
Flexible learning	Weekend only tutorial sessions to be arranged closer to the residence or workplace	√	√	√

Table 2 shows that job specific training, flexible learning system, gender friendly environment and financial and material supports to girls will work as incentives for the inclusion of the dropout girls.

8. Access to ICT

ICT is very crucial to make the learning system more flexible. Although it is highly preferable that access to ICT can enhance the flexibility in learning, the dropout girls under the study do not have desired access to ICT. Table 3 summarizes their access to ICTs.

Table 3: Access of girls to ICT

ICT type	Endowment	Access	Usage
Cell phone	No	√ <input type="checkbox"/> Family √ <input type="checkbox"/> Kiosk	Communicating
Computer	No	√ <input type="checkbox"/> Can operate √ <input type="checkbox"/> Cyber cafe	Not specified
Telephone	No	<input type="checkbox"/> Family √ <input type="checkbox"/> Kiosk	Communicating
Internet	No	<input type="checkbox"/> Family √ <input type="checkbox"/> Cyber cafe	Not used
Television	Yes	√ <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Neighbor	Entertainment
Radio	Yes	√ <input type="checkbox"/> Family √ <input type="checkbox"/> Neighbor	Listening music

Table 3 shows that the dropout girls only have access to cell phone, television and radio which belongs to their families. They don't actually own anything. Of course, they have the scope to use cell phone or even computer or internet at the kiosks or cyber café.

9. Strategy matrix for addressing girls educational challenges

Given the constraints with girls education in an on-campus education system, ODL can be the best alternative to ensure the inclusion of these vulnerable girls into education again. Table 4 shows that if their learning options have to be accommodated, open schooling is the best strategy.

Table 4: Scope of Open schooling to address girls' education challenges

Desired options	On-campus	Open schooling	
		Formal	Non-formal
Vocational	√	√	√
Low opportunity cost		√	
Flexibility		√	√
Future Return		√	
Low cost/Free		√	√
Job/employment specific		√	√
Multiple exits		√	
Gender needs		√	√

Through open schooling, the dropout girls can be brought back to education without hurting their works and family engagements. Both formal and non-formal programs may be designed to ensure their inclusion into education.

10. Conclusion and recommendations

The study has identified a number of factors that causes the discontinuity of girls' education in junior secondary level. The factors include poverty, child marriage, expensive education, involving adolescent girls in homestead chores, many of ultra poor families deployed to existing job market, early marriage, etc. The girls can be back into education if some interventions fcan be made. The desired interventions include free of cost education programme, financial assistance, vocational training related to sewing, handloom operation, handicraft making, beautification, electric fixing, foreign language, computer operation, cooking and baking, etc. Based on the aforementioned findings, some strategies may be implemented to include the dropout girls into education. Recommendations can be summarized as below:

- 10.1. **Launching JSC program through ODL:** BOU may launch special Junior School Certificate (JSC) program through ODL for the dropped out unprivileged girls;
- 10.2. **Blended courses:** Program must contain the conventional educational courses and the courses that are related to capacity building for income generating activities;
- 10.3. **Innovative delivery:** BOU may start with opening the study centers at regional level (maybe 10), then expand the study centers up to Thana levels/Union Parisad levels based on the experiences at the regional level centers;
- 10.4. **Study centers in close distance:** Study centers for dropout girls should be closer to the factories/mills/tea gardens where they are engaged in, which will motivate the employers to allow their girl employees attend the tutorial sessions;
- 10.5. **ICT based education:** Any steps for introducing education through cell phone and internet (e- learning) will be highly appreciated if required number of smart phones are provided to the learners. This kind of steps will encourage the learners more to engage themselves in the learning process;
- 10.6. **Social mobilization:** Social mobilization and awareness building efforts will be made to encourage the guardians for sending their girls back to education.
- 10.7. **Educational package:** Need-based vocational training package along with the general courses should be provided to ensure that the girls will be able to engage them in job or self-employing opportunities just after their education.
- 10.8. **Development and use of OER:** For enhancing the quality and efficiency of the ODL programs, sharing of the educational resources is a must. BOU must design and implement OER policy soon. It will help BOU reduce the cost of producing the study materials and avoid the risk of quality shirking in its programs. It is important for the girls education. A OER policy should take place to enhance the quality of education and reducing the underlying costs.

- 10.9. **Gender policy:** To avoid the gender sensitive problems observed in the on-campus system, gender considerations must be maintained all spheres of deliveries and learner support system. The tutoring, student support services, and text contents – everywhere gender needs must be considered carefully. A complete gender policy should be developed to reinforce gender equality in ODL deliveries.
- 10.10. **Cross border cooperation:** The cross-border cooperation in regional and global levels on the same issue will allow the educators share their experiences among each other, which will reinforce the quality and efficiency in girls' education.

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