

Capacity Building of the mid-level executives through BBA programme of BOU: Efficacy and Efficiency Issues

Sub-theme: Skills Development

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Abstract

In the present wave of rapid technological innovations, changing market conditions and the emergence of a knowledge-based society, it is almost impossible for a country or economy to keep itself separated from the rest of the world. As a result, every country faces a wide range of challenges arises from the global changes. A wide reservoir of human capital can work as the safeguard for a nation in absorbing the shocks from rapidly growing trend in globalization. However, it is very difficult for the resource-poor developing countries like Bangladesh to form human capital rapidly with the traditional education and training arrangements. Here, the role of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is very crucial. The paper presents role of BBA program in developing skills of the learners. The paper also discusses the challenges with capacity building through BBA program of BOU. Finally, the paper presents some recommendations/policy prescriptions for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of BBA program in developing skills of the learners, especially the mid-level executives. ICT incorporation and cross-border cooperation for enhancing quality and efficiency of BBA program has also been discussed carefully in the paper.

Keywords: Capacity building, ODL, Business education, Efficacy, Efficiency, ICT

1. INTRODUCTION

Education generates knowledge and skills, which act as the engines of growth and development. Knowledge has become an important element of production along with capital and labor, and thus, has significantly transformed. Asian Bank (2005) defined human capital as the skill, knowledge and good health that together allows people to work and earn a living. Olakulehin (2008) reviewed several studies that showed the strong positive correlation between the human capital (skills, abilities, and competencies) and the levels of social and economic performance of individuals, communities and nations.

Developing countries characterised by less efficient organisations of work or by obsolete technologies might need to rely more on formal vocational education and training. What level of education (primary, secondary or tertiary) is required to achieve this goal depends on the kind of competence to be built. Post-secondary education, including degree-granting tertiary education, is certainly important for developing capacity in some fields (Vincet, 2004). Capacity building is an essential element for developing Bangladesh to help them reduce poverty and stimulate economic growth. While the expansion of a more highly skilled work force is the crying need to meet the MDGs and the goals of Bangladesh Vision 2021, on-campus education system in Bangladesh faces particular problems with capacity and quality which impedes the speed of capacity building. Therefore, ODL has become one of the alternative options to ensure quality education and easy access of education for all sections of people in the society.

In this paper, the experiences, opportunities and challenges of BBA program of BOU in building human capacity in Bangladesh has been discussed critically. The contribution of ODL to the human skill development efforts in Bangladesh in recent decades has been presented. The paper also prescribes some quality tips and ICT interventions for making BBA more effective in enhancing the human capital in the country. The potentials of cross border cooperation in education to reinforce the capacity building efforts of the country has been highlighted too.

2. OBJECTIVES

The broad objective of this study is to investigate the experiences, opportunities and challenges of ODL programs in building human capacity in Bangladesh.

The specific objectives are:

- To overview the BBA program of BOU;
- To investigate the contribution of the BBA programs to develop the human skill in Bangladesh;
- To identify some quality tips and scope of ICT interventions for making BBA program more effective in enhancing the human capital in the country; and
- To discuss the potentials of cross border cooperation in education to reinforce the capacity building efforts of the country.

3. METHODOLOGY

In the study, both primary and secondary data have been used. The student support service division and the exams division of BOU are the major sources of secondary data. Also, BANBEIS and Worldbank database have been browsed to have a statistical overview on the on-campus tertiary education in Bangladesh. For primary data, a cross sectional survey has been conducted on the learners of BBA program through a structured questionnaire and interviewing method. Moreover, the perceptions of the learners have been analysed in the study to assess the role of ODL for capacity building.

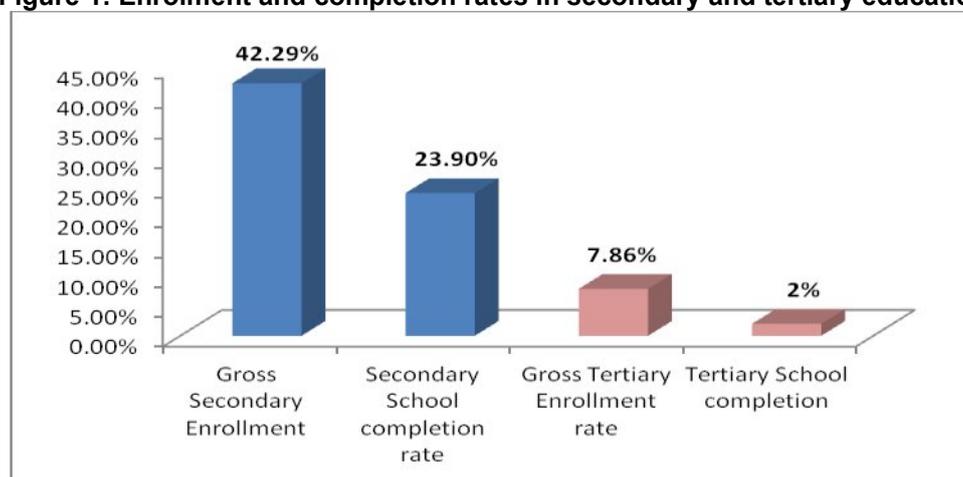
4. OVERALL EDUCATIONAL SCENARIO IN BANGLADESH

The education system in Bangladesh is mostly dominated by the on-campus system, though the capacity is limited. Started in 1956, distance education system was running side by side with on-campus system; however, it got wider scale since the establishment of Bangladesh Open University in 1992.

4.1. On-campus education in Bangladesh

In the case of tertiary education, the capacity of the on-campus system is very limited. Both public (31) and private universities (51) together got the capacity to absorb only 439406 students (7.8% of the 15+ population) and also the quality is still a very big issue in the case of tertiary education provided by private universities. Figure 1 shows the enrolment and completion rates in secondary and tertiary education in Bangladesh.

Figure 1: Enrolment and completion rates in secondary and tertiary education



Source: World Bank, 2009-2010

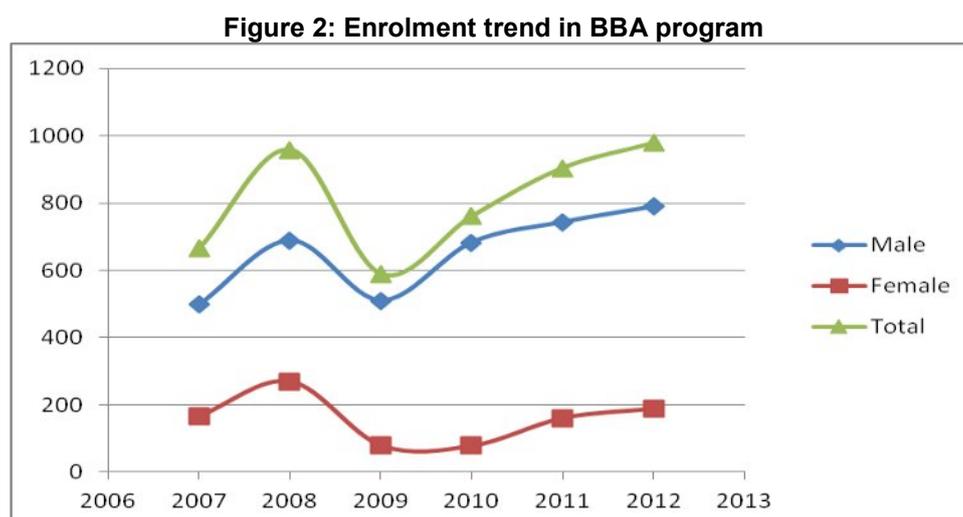
However, despite all these initiatives, the challenge still remains as the population size continues to increase and consequently, the demand for university education is rising. The on-campus educational set-up is not growing with the growth in the demand for education. It is not unrealistic too in this resource poor developing country. The establishment of the Bangladesh Open University (BOU) was thus an appropriate step to complement the gap.

4.2. ODL Practices in Bangladesh

4.2.1. Evolution of ODL in Bangladesh: Distance education in Bangladesh started its journey in 1956. Bangladesh Open University is the only public university in Bangladesh which offers mainly ODL programs. The aim of BOU is to transform the country's vast human resources into an educated and trained work-force by extending to them a wide range of academic programs both formal and non-formal. BOU's programs targets at every citizen who is interested to learn, particularly working people and women and the socially disadvantaged groups who cannot enrol into the academic and training programs offered by the on-campus universities. BOU has already set up 12 Regional Resources Centers (RRCs) and 80 Local Coordinating Offices (LCOs) in different parts of the country. There are about 800 study centers all over the country.

4.2.2. BBA Program

BBA Program is the largest program of School of Business in terms of enrolment. Figure 2 shows the enrolment trend for BBA program in last few years.



Source: Student Support Services division, BOU (2013)

Figure 2 shows that the demand for the BBA program of BOU is growing over time. Both male and female enrolments are growing.

5. CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH ODL

A number of BOU programs are directly related to human skill development. Table-1 shows the list of the Business education programs of BOU against the target skills:

Table 1: Selected BOU programs and the target skills

Program	Level	Target skills
BBA: Bachelor of Business Administration	Undergraduate	Skills for managing business at mid level
MBA: Master of Business Administration	Graduate	Business management – top level
Commonwealth Executive MBA	Graduate	Business management – top level
Commonwealth Executive MPA	Graduate	Skills for the public service management

Source: BOU Students Support Services, 2013

5.1. Learners' perceptions regarding capacity building through BBA programs

The perceptions of the learners of BBA program of BOU have been studied to identify the capacity building interventions of BBA program. In our survey on the learners of BBA program, it has been found that most of the learners in BBA program enrolled into the program mostly for acquiring knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies required to have a good job. Some of the learners pursue this program for further study.. Table 2 shows the results found in the survey.

Table 2: Perceptions of the learners of BBA program regarding capacity building

Expectations, preferences and access	BBA learners	
	Male	Female
Gain Knowledge	60%	60%
Gain skills	70%	50%
Improvement of abilities and competencies	60%	60%
Career advancements	60%	80%
Pursuing further study	70%	20%
Self-satisfaction	20%	15%
Preferred mode of delivery	Print + Online	Print + Online

6. CHALLENGES WITH CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH BBA

Although BBA program through ODL is the special addition to the capacity building efforts of the on-campus programs of the country and got huge potentials to quench the deficiency in human capital here, there are some challenges that are to be addressed to ensure the quality and efficiency of BBA program:

- 6.1. **Quality of study materials:** The study materials are undoubtedly of high quality at BOU; however, the time-to-time revision is missing. As a result, learners sometimes are missing the latest developments in their field of study and thus they fail to have desired knowledge and skills.
- 6.2. **Inadequacy of skilled manpower:** Although the availability of skilled manpower is of grave importance for the effective management of the learner support system, BOU is still suffering from the lack of skilled manpower due to the limited training and development initiatives. Most of the support staffs and officers are with traditional on-campus mentality and they can't realize the learners' needs. So, the learners do not get real-time supports from them. In addition, the staff-learner ratio is so low that all the learners cannot be communicated sufficiently.
- 6.3. **Bureaucratic delay in decision making:** Sometimes the learners suffer from the bureaucratic delays in making and implementing decisions relating to learner support and examinations. This kind of delay makes the learners frustrated and they cannot maximize their learning outcome.
- 6.4. **Traditional exam management system:** BOU is still following the manual exam management system, which makes the learners frustrated and the programs are thereby affected.
- 6.5. **Digital divide between rural and urban learners:** There is a big divide in terms of access to ICTs between the rural and urban learners, which makes the uniform use of ICTs in BOU programs very much difficult. In some cases, use of ICTs is just impossible as the learners are not e-ready. On overall sense, online courses cannot be launched due to the lack of e-readiness and poor access to ICTs.
- 6.6. **High turnover of the teaching staffs:** It has been observed that the turnover rate of quality teaching staffs is relative high at BOU. It makes the teacher-learner ratio unfavorable for the learners. Therefore, the learners do not get real-time feedbacks from the teachers.
- 6.7. **Inflexible learner management system:** In most cases, BOU uses the face-to-face and print based management system. Learners are always bound to come to the regional or local centers to have learner supports. For a single task, they some need to come several times, which is truly difficult for them. This difficulty is very high for the female learners.

- 6.8. **On-campus biasness:** ODL practices are still not popular as a method of education. The employers and other stakeholders still prefer on-campus degrees more to the degrees from ODL institutions. Due to this recognition problem, ODL cannot get sufficient popularity among the citizens and thence the formation of human capital becomes slow.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ODL is undoubtedly the very important means of developing human skill in the resource poor developing country like Bangladesh. BBA program offered by BOU has indeed significant contributions to the capacity building efforts in the country. However, for the formation of quality human capital, high performance of the BBA program is very much crucial. In our study, the scope of intervention has been identified to enhance the quality of BBA program of BOU. Below are some of our recommendations for the enhancement of the quality, efficiency and recognition of BBA program:

- 7.1. **Using ICT:** For ensuring flexibility and quality in the delivery of BBA program, use of ICT is a must. BOU needs to incorporate ICT in its educational delivery. It seems that the country is now in a better position in terms of access to ICT. A significant increase in the use of cell phone, internet and computer has already been occurred in last few decades.
- 7.2. **OER Policy:** For enhancing the quality and efficiency of the BBA program, 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.
- 7.3. **Real-time interaction:** To reinforce the confidence of the learners, BOU must initiate real-time interaction with the learners. Effective use of ICTs will be useful for ensuring the real-time interaction.
- 7.4. **Guidelines for peer-peer interaction:** For enhancing the quality of the BBA program, peer-peer interactions must be encouraged in BOU programs. A set of guidelines must be implemented for encouraging the peer-peer interactions at the study centers.
- 7.5. **Making BOU a best place for work:** BOU authority must provide incentives to the teachers and officers so that the quality teachers and officers remain with the university.
- 7.6. **Gender policy:** ODL got high potentials to include the female population who cannot have education from on-campus system due to a number of social, cultural and economic barriers. BOU should formulate and implement a gender policy where gender needs will be addressed in all spheres of ODL practices.
- 7.7. **Cross border cooperation in tertiary education:** The cross-border cooperation in regional and global levels may be formed for sharing the quality education and minimising the cost of education, which is crucial for the developing countries like Bangladesh. To meet the high demand of human capital in the emerging developing countries like Bangladesh, cross-border cooperation in education can be a good solution.

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