

# Study on Open School Learners' Access to Electronic Media and their Use

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Open School of Bangladesh Open University (BOU-OS) uses both the conventional face-to-face (f2f) tutorial system based on the print module and electronic technologies such as CDs, audio-visual cassettes, and radio-TV broadcasts for the delivery of the programmes. It means that the use of ICTs in the delivery of academic programme at BOU is still minimal. In Bangladesh concept of technology-enabled open schooling was initiated in 1956 with 'School Broadcasting Program (SBP)' and still that is academically controlled by the BOU-OS. Therefore, the BOU came into existence through using electronic media. Finally, BOU adopted m-Learning because of the increasing popularity of the mobile phone and that it has provided an additional medium for the operation of distance. Still no comprehensive study is conducted how the learners get accessed to these media and what extend they use them to complete their learning? The current research has wonderful implication in both national and BOU policy formation. This study has huge implications to the policy developers. This will also have implications for policy in the BOU. At a wider level, it will have implications for the entire education sector as the second chance education is performing the major role of the educational provision. In this paper, we obtained opinion of the learners in BOU-OS on the access and use of media. The problems faced by the learners and suggestions for the improvements in the media usage have also been presented.

## 2 OBJECTIVES

The aim of the current study is to obtain the feedback of learners in respect to their access to electronic media what BOU uses for its programme delivery, observations on usefulness of media, influences of media on their learning, interest in the use of media and suggestions for improving the utilization of broadcast media in open and distance learning (ODL). This study also achieves the following specific objectives:

- to evaluate the media access for the learners;
- to identify the pattern of media use by the OS learners;
- to obtain the learner's opinion on helpfulness of radio-TV broadcasts in perceptive of subject matter; and
- to analyze the feedback of the learners on practical issues in using radio-TV in improving their learning environment.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Questionnaire

The aim of the current research is to determine the relationship between OS learner use of electronic media and reading proficiency in the BOU-OS; it also investigates to what extend the radio-TV broadcasts influences on the OS's learners' learning environment; to find out how effectively the learners are being benefited through listening the radio programmes; to examine the computer communication, if any, and/or SMS is useful for learning activities. The predictor variables are viewing television programmes, listening radio programmes, using a computer for communication, and text messaging through mobile. Subjects included 300 SSC learners. Mean responses is used to statistically measure the effects years in the OS

has on electronic media variables. The questionnaire instrument is developed by the authors for administering to the learners are enrolled through open schooling to obtain information related to objectives of the study noted above. Items for collecting data on the personal background of the respondents were not included, as OS learners are from more or less similar socio-economic background in Bangladesh as it has homogeneous characteristics. Attitude items were structured to provide different alternatives to the respondents to be identified. Dyer (1995) states,

...'attitude scales do not need to be factually accurate - they simply need to reflect one possible perception of the truth. ....[respondents] will not be assessing the factual accuracy of each item, but will be responding to the feelings which the statement triggers in them'

In line with the above statement, when constructing a Likert scale a pool of statements needs to be generated that are relevant to the attitude used with five options such as Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neither Agree nor Disagree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1) for attitude scales. A graduate from the education field was appointed as 'Research Associate' and she collected data through interviews as well as asking for self-feedback in the script. First and second author has been very involved in supervising the data collection, analysis and interpretations; and the third author has been the PhD supervisor of the first author who provided the final shape of the paper and his wisdom reflected in the paper.

### 3.2 Data collection

The present research is a descriptive in nature and respondents who were involved in the research were physically presented at the Dhaka Regional Resources Centre (Dhaka RRC) as learners usually from all over the country come to seek information on the matter of courses of studies. This was only because to conduct survey by mail the structured questionnaires to send to the sample respondents to collect data relevant for this study was time consuming. Mail wasn't feasible for the stipulated time and 300 learners were interviewed to learners enrolled in SSC programme of the BOU-OS. A time period of two weeks was fixed for receiving the filled in questionnaires. This resulted in collection of 300 responses from distance learners. SPSS was used to analyse the data.

## 4 MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

Bangladesh inherited technology-enabled open schooling from its predecessor, which was initiated in 1956 through creating an Audio-Visual Cell (AVC) and later the AVEC in 1962 (AVEC, 1968 & 1971). In 1978-1980, a pilot project entitled 'School Broadcasting Program (SBP)' was undertaken. A second Shiksharthir Ashar (School Broadcast) started on 1st January 1981. At present, Shiksharthir Ashar is academically controlled by the BOU-Open School. The School makes selection of anchor teachers, broadcast topics, and issues appointment letters after a number of meetings with concerned personnel of Bangladesh Betar (Bangladesh Radio). The appointed teachers then prepare the manuscript and get it recorded at the recording radio station (Hossain and Muttaqi, 2007; Rahman et al., 2012).



Figure 1. Evolution of distance education in Bangladesh. (Source: Rahman et al., 2012)

In 1983, the SBP and AVEC were merged to form the National Institute of Educational Media and Technology (NIEMT). In 1995, the Bangladesh Institute of Distance Education (BIDE) was established to run teacher education programme, and NIEMT was merged with the BIDE and, finally, BOU came into existence in 1992 after the ratification of an Act in the Bangladesh National Parliament (MoL, 1992). BIDE was merged with the Bangladesh Open University (BOU) which is now the only university in Bangladesh that offers a number of ODL programmes using the self-learning materials (SLMs) as print media, and radio-TV broadcasts (RTBs) on the national broadcast channels as electronic media and face-to-face tutorial support services (TSSs). Finally, BOU adopted m-Learning because of the increasing popularity of the mobile phone and that it has provided an additional medium for the operation of distance education (Figure 1) (Islam 2010).

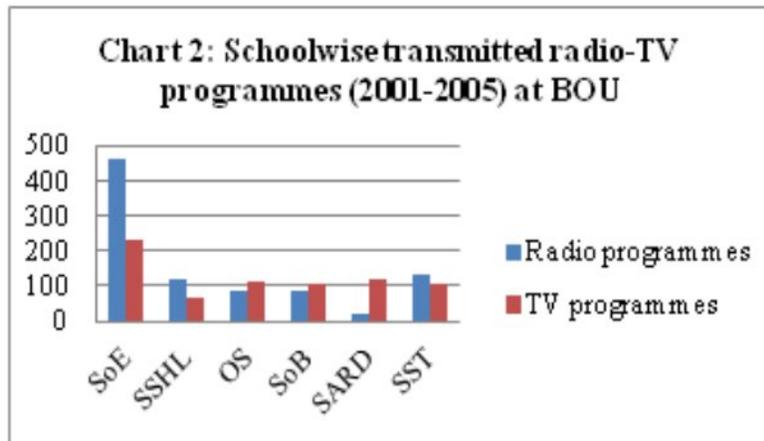


Figure 2. School-wise transmitted radio-TV programs (2001-2005) at BOU (Source: Rahman et al. 2012)

BOU regularly broadcasts radio-TV programmes on the national chunk allocated to its six schools (see figure 2). Not many researches were conducted in this field; and the current research hopefully does have some sort of impact in formulating media policy by the BOU. Currently, BOU re-strategizes the media deployment for the programmes delivery and redesigns the open schooling programmes as per the national innovative curriculum which puts emphasis on the structured (innovative) questionnaire for the learners' school-based assessment and final evaluation with a view to making them more scientific.

## 5 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 5.1 Access to media

The response of the learners on media (radio/TV/mobile phone) access by them indicated majority (75%) have access (mean value is 3.49) and computer media access denoted nearly 50% and the learners uses the radio-TV broadcasts for their various learning activities. The media had not been in the tutorial centres (TCs) for the learners for their learning activities. The reasons may be of accessibility, relevance to the programme or attitudinal barriers. The computer is available to 60 percent learners either at their home or at work place, and/or cybercafé (table 1); but were used by 45% of them respectively in the form of internet, email and facebook etc. It reveals that media is getting popularized; it maybe of implementing the digital-Bangladesh agenda by the government and of academic activities such as admission, result publication online and other services have been implemented online. OS implemented a virtual interactive classroom (VIC) for the SSC learners in a limited way using the SMS technology; very few learners (10%) heard about it.

**Table 1: Learners' responses on access to and use of media**

|   | No. | SA<br>% | A<br>% | UD<br>% | D<br>% | SD<br>% | Mean |
|---|-----|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|------|
| I have access to radio/TV/mobile phone                                      | 247 | 33.6    | 17     | 25.1    | 11.3   | 13      | 3.49 |
| I have access to computer technologies                                      | 270 | 7.4     | 41.1   | 10      | 22.6   | 18.9    | 2.96 |
| I use internet, email, facebook etc.  | 276 | 6.5     | 37.7   | 8.3     | 19.6   | 27.9    | 2.75 |
| My tutorial centre (TC) has physical facilities to use of these audio-video | 275 | 0       | 0      | 6.5     | 16.4   | 77.1    | 1.29 |
| The Open School provides help in using various media/ technologies          | 261 | 0       | 0      | 7.7     | 16.5   | 75.9    | 1.32 |
| I understand or follow various radio-TV broadcasts adopted in my programme  | 253 | 36.8    | 16.2   | 24.5    | 10.7   | 11.9    | 3.55 |
| Radio-TV broadcasts in my programme are relevant                            | 261 | 44.1    | 14.2   | 21.8    | 8.8    | 11.1    | 3.71 |
| Radio-TV broadcast in my programme are interesting                          | 270 | 49.26   | 17     | 18.5    | 5.9    | 9.3     | 3.91 |
| Language used in radio-TV broadcast in the programme is difficult           | 260 | 36.5    | 13.8   | 30.8    | 10     | 8.8     | 3.59 |
| I am satisfied with time allotted for radio-TV                              | 277 | 9.4     | 38.6   | 15.9    | 19.1   | 17      | 3.04 |
| I have heard about virtual interactive classroom                            | 275 | 5.1     | 4      | 6.5     | 14.5   | 69.8    | 1.6  |
| Watching video/audio is more interesting than studying the SLMs             | 250 | 39.2    | 20.8   | 21.2    | 8.8    | 10      | 3.7  |
| Watching video/audio is more useful than studying the SLMs                  | 259 | 36.3    | 17.8   | 27.4    | 8.5    | 10      | 3.62 |
| Use of electronic media is effective in improving my performance            | 272 | 50.7    | 21.3   | 14.7    | 5.9    | 7.4     | 4.02 |
| Use of electronic media is effective in improving my interest in studies    | 269 | 46.5    | 22.7   | 17.5    | 5.9    | 7.4     | 3.95 |

## 5.2 Problems in using of electronic media

Learners are not provided with the media facilities such as relevant audio-video cassettes/ learning CDs; this may help them to get used to in utilizing the electronic and computer media for completion of their learning activities. Even they are not provided with the counseling for using media (the mean value is 1.32); most of the learners responded their disagreement in this issue. Media allocation for the Open School has been very little and learners (50%) also provided their agreement; this just average. Language used in the programmes are also shows the difficulties as only 45% provided their agreement (mean value is 3.59); therefore the difficulty level to understand lectures is high.

## 5.3 Effectiveness

OS's media programmes are of interesting to the SSC learners (mean value is 3.91) and also more interesting than studying the self-learning materials, as responded by the 50% learners. This result shows that the radio-TV broadcasts have been effective for improving the performance (mean value 4). Therefore, radio-TV broadcast has been the integral role of the programme delivery at the Open School rather than the marginal role after the print media.

## 6 SUGGESTIONS

Adaptability of media is not yet considered, but the media, which could be accessed by the learners and relevant to the course, should be included in programme curriculum. The media should be the supplement of the print and instruction for media broadcasts are to be in the SLMs so that the learners can have the opportunity to know the topic and broadcast time. TCs are to be equipped with the media facility so that learners can listen or watch the programme there and the tutors also should be trained in handling various media. In addition, each learner should be provided with an email ID so that they can get used to use the internet and open educational resources (OER) materials for their studies. Access to internet should be made available at the TCs and more general type of information should be placed at the web

site of respective open schools. Management of open school should be instructed to respond to the queries of the learners sent through e-mail in time.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

The analysis on responses of learners indicated that open schooling has been accepted by eighth-graders from the conventional schools and dropped out of the system for any socio-economic and/or demographic reasons. Open School has been very successful in the endeavor of providing learning an environment through mix of media and particularly electronic media is of valuable for implementing as it creates interest in learners to stay in the programme till completion. To explore the possibilities of 'reach to the unreached' the learners with the help of various electronic media, they were interviewed to give their opinions on various aspects pertaining to the usage of media in open schooling. On the question of effective usefulness of three media such as print (SLMs), broadcasts (radio-TV) and human (tutors) in their learning activities, the learners envisaged supplementary role of electronic media, by grading the helpfulness of all media except computer, as poor. In learner's opinion, help extended by radio-TV was also considered as average. The poor availability of media to learners either at their place or at the TCs could be the probable reason for the same. The agreement index of the learners also reveals that most of the learners were not satisfied with the time allotted for media use and almost all learners were also not sure of the access to the media at the TCs. Therefore, BOU should be more responsible for deployment of media in the TCs and redesign the school curriculum focusing on more access to electronic and ICT. Learners should require counseling for use of media at the TCs when they attend the tutorial sessions in the weekend.

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