CHALLENGES FOR TUTORING THROUGH BLENDED MODE OF EDUCATION DELIVERY IN SECONDARY SCHOOL CERTIFICATE (SSC) PROGRAMME OF BANGLADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY

Md. Shafiqul Alam
Registrar, Bangladesh Open University, Gazipur 1705, Bangladesh
email:shafiqul_bou@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Tutoring is the only mean of face-to-face contact of learners with tutors at Bangladesh Open University. But there are a number of problems that hampers tutoring and as a result the quality of education of this programme is deteriorating. This study investigates the problems of tutoring for Secondary School Certificate (SSC) programme of BOU already existing and hampering the quality of the programme. The quantitative study was carried out with 42 tutors with a survey. The research design was delineated in such a way that the objective, design and methodology of the study allowed to bring out and highlight the tutoring system in Open Distance Learning (ODL) considering the perspectives of both tutors and learners. This study concluded that there were problems of tutoring related to either management or academic. However, these were mainly related to tutor and learner-two key players of tutoring on ODL system. The problems of tutoring in SSC programme of Bangladesh Open University were: less communication between tutors and learners; incapability of understanding course content; lack of interest in learning; inadequate number of tutorial classes; excess and complex course content; appointment of less qualified tutors; lack of training of tutors; dissatisfaction on honorarium for tutoring; lack of knowledge in use of ICT.

Keywords: Challenges; Blended Mode; Tutoring; Mega University; Quality Education

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is the only public Open Distance Learning (ODL) institution in the country founded in October 1992. It is an exceptional institution in the country that makes an access for common people to education. BOU has a wide network throughout the country consisting of 12 regional centers, 80 sub-regional centers and about 1506 study centers. It has 29,788 part-time tutors who act as local mentors and counsellors of learners. The total number of its learners now stands at 540,000. In terms of learners’ number, BOU may be considered as a Mega University. However, according to UNESCO
(2010), the ultimate success of any education system is not how many learners are in school, but what and how well they learn. In order to ensure the quality of education, the university uses a blend of media considering the access and affordability of the learners. The choice of media varies from programme to programme. Both synchronous and asynchronous modes are chosen for the effective delivery of the courses. The media used so far in BOU programmes are print materials, weekly lectures, audio cassettes, video broadcasts, internet, YouTube, email, Facebook etc. Recently a huge number of audio and video programs have been uploaded into YouTube. Another innovative media is ‘mobile device/set compatible SD card containing e-books and audio-visual materials, which are ready to provide learners on demand. Books of all programmes have been uploaded to the BOU’s website. Any learner can download these e-books and web-Radio. Thus, the learners can watch the tutorial sessions and other relevant presentations live-streamed directly from the BOU’s Media Center’s Studios.

BOU’s Secondary School Certificate (SSC) programme has 70,000 learners and 8,500 tutors located throughout the country. Tutoring is the only means of face-to-face contact of learners with tutors. But there are a number of problems that hampers tutoring and as a result the quality of education of this programme is deteriorating. This paper describes the challenges of tutoring in blended mode of ODL in SSC programme of BOU with recommendations.

Objectives

This paper investigated the already existing problems of tutoring for SSC program of BOU that hampered the quality of the programme and to suggest possible solutions and recommendations in order to improve quality of education of SSC programme.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tutor

A tutor is a teacher usually instructing individual students and she/he is a member of staff responsible for the teaching and supervision of a certain number of students. They act as guardian (Collins Concise Dictionary). A tutor’s role is to guide the student in solving the problem.

Tutors are just one means of supporting learners, but they are widely seen as the most important of a support system. They are the most crucial form of learner support. Without learner support, the best materials in the world may prove disappointing [1].
Roles of Tutors in ODL

The roles of an ODL tutor are mentioned below:

Subject Matter Expert

A tutor should be a subject matter expertise. The most obvious requirement to be an effective teacher is the content knowledge of the subject [2]. Regular tutor led contact sessions are an important learner support strategy that may be an incentive for student enrolment in the programme [3]. A tutor should present the content in a convincing way that will inspire and create confidence among learners.

Counsellor

As a counsellor, the tutor should give students moral support. Being trustworthy, flexible and approachable are some of the necessary tutor attributes for one to effectively counsel students. Tutors should be perceived by learners as caring and approachable [4].

Assessor

It is one of the roles of a tutor to collect, measure and interpret information and relate it to learners’ responses or performances to the process of instruction [5]. Tutors assess learners’ work to measure attainment, to determine if learning and performance goals were achieved, to decipher root of students’ problem in a course and to obtain some basis for the evaluation and improvement of teaching, learning and performance effectiveness [5]. According to Poonwassie [6] the main areas of tutor’s sustaining responsibilities are in initiating and maintaining supportive contact with learners.

Tutors are responsible for both tutoring and counselling and may be called tutor- counsellor; in other systems the roles are separated. In BOU, tutors actually work both as tutor and counsellor. The tasks of an ODL tutor both as tutor and counsellor [7] are mentioned below:

- Advise on available learning materials;
- Answer course-related queries;
- Mark and comment on written work such as assignments;
- Tutor individual students face-to-face;
- Tutor face-to-face groups;
- Tutor individual students by phone or on-line;
- Tutor groups by phone or on-line;
- Keep record of student progress;
- Answer non-course related topic;
• Give guidance about choice of course;
• Support students during their course; and
• Advise students about ODL system.

**Tutoring**

Tutoring is a period of intensive tuition given by a tutor to an individual student or a small group of students. Tutoring in open and distance learning is designed [8] to:

• Bring an interpersonal element to the learning process;
• Foster to collaborative learning and support in small groups and
• Enrich print-based learning through a variety of practical and interactive exercises.

Therefore, the process of tutoring can be said to be the process of facilitation in the contact session. The process includes: 1) encouraging and facilitating learners to develop their basic learning skills, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing for self-learning; 2) helping and facilitating learners to make their learning meaningful; and 3) enabling and helping learners to deal with and remove obstacles [9].

**METHODOLOGY**

**Data Collection**

The survey was carried out to collect data from tutors. The draft questionnaires were submitted to three education researchers in Bangladesh who have knowledge and experience in this field for their comments and suggestions regarding its validation. The questionnaires were then revised and further developed incorporating the comments and suggestions as received. At this stage in preparing the questionnaires, a pilot run was carried out in two study centers. Finally, there were adjusted by incorporating any required changes that seemed necessary according to issues that arose during the pilot trial. The contents of the tutors’ questionnaire were related to tutors’ background information, problem issues and elements, the factors of tutoring system of SSC program of the BOU.

**Questionnaire survey**

Data were captured from sample tutors. The researcher briefed the teachers of each sample school on the purpose of the survey. They were also briefed about the questionnaire so they could answer the questions correctly. These teachers helped bring the tutors of their respective schools to attend the questionnaire survey. Their prior briefings on this research made them confident in this job.
Data management

The survey was conducted in study centers of SSC programme of BOU. The completed tutors’ questionnaires were kept separately and sorted out by study centers in order to locate the information of particular informants easily. Each questionnaire was also marked by an individual identification number. Therefore, the data were fed into the computer in SPSS sheets for tutors. Data inputs were checked and screened.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed by using SPSS software. The survey data for tutors was analysed individually. This helped to neatly compare the results of the survey. The choice of item inclusion emerged from the preliminary analysis of the case study data, into the questionnaires that had been facilitated to conceptualize and to present the survey results. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results were presented by percentage (%) and total number both in table and graph. Interpretation was then made to explain the problems of tutoring of SSC program of BOU.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Participants

Tutors of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) of BOU were informants in this action research. The question may arise as to why the tutors of SSC programme were chosen for questionnaire survey. The learners of SSC program of the BOU were facing many problems in their learning in ODL systems and this was the lower level programme in the university offering through distance mode. In terms of identifying the problems in tutoring, it was better to capture data from tutors as they were really concerned about the problems arising in tutoring learners of SSC programme of BOU.

Tutors

Tutors are generally recruited from the teachers of government and private high schools. They teach ODL learners of Bangladesh Open University at the weekend. They are occupied with their duties in Schools in other days of the week. This is their permanent job. They work part-time at BOU.

In this research, informants were selected from 10 (ten) study centers (tutorial centers) of Gazipur sub-regional center of BOU located in Gazipur district. A total number of 42 tutors (32 males and 10 females) participated the survey.
According to tutors, the survey reported that the educational qualifications of tutor respondents were Masters (54.8%) and Bachelor (45.2%). They live in urban (78.6%), suburban (11.9%) and rural (9.5%). Most of them (95.2%) taught in secondary schools. However, a few number of tutors was teaching in colleges.

Problems of Tutoring in SSC Programme of BOU

The literature suggests that there are many obstacles in tutoring in ODL systems. These are inadequate background, lack of study skills, difficulties with language of instruction, time management, learning disabilities, technological difficulties, emotional problems and physical difficulties [9]. These are difficulties of learners. This study reported that there are two types of problems arising in tutoring SSC learners of the BOU. These are learners oriented and tutors oriented problems. These may be management or academic related issues that hamper tutoring and ultimately, deteriorate the quality of education.

Problems Related to Learners

Learners in SSC programme of BOU are generally drop-out from conventional system of education. Most of them are poor and engaged in works. The study suggested some problems related to learners as shown in Table I were:

- Less communication between tutors and learners;
- Incapability of understanding course content;
- Lack of interest in learning;
- Inadequate number of tutorial class;
- Large volume and complex course content;
- Lack of knowledge in use of ICT.

| TABLE I. LEARNER ORIENTED PROBLEM | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Less communication between tutors and learner | Yes 31 | 73.8 |
| | No 11 | 26.2 |
| Incapability of Understanding Course Content | Yes 11 | 26.2 |
| | No 31 | 73.8 |
| Lack of Interest in Learning | Yes 32 | 76.2 |
| | No 10 | 23.8 |
| Inadequate Number of Tutorial Classes | Yes 38 | 90.5 |
| | No 4 | 9.5 |
| Excess and Complex Content | Yes 27 | 64.3 |
| | No 15 | 35.7 |
Tutors Related Problems

There are two main actors in Tutoring of ODL. These are: tutor - as provider of support and learner - as receiver of support. Tutor is the key element of tutoring process. This study suggested that there were some problems in tutoring of ODL system in providing SSC programme as shown in Table II:

- Appointment of less qualified tutors
- Lack of appropriate training for tutors
- dissatisfaction on honorarium provided by the university
- Inadequate number of tutoring classes
- Lack of knowledge in use of ICT
- Lack of commitment

| Appointment of Less Qualified Tutor | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Yes                                | 29        | 69          |
| No                                 | 13        | 31          |

| Appropriate Training for Tutors    | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Yes                                | 11        | 9.5         |
| No                                 | 31        | 78.6        |
| Sometimes                          | 5         | 11.9        |

| Satisfaction on Honorarium         | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Yes                                | 6         | 14.3        |
| No                                 | 36        | 85.7        |

| Adequate Number of Tutor Classes   | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Less than Adequate                 | 32        | 76.2        |
| Adequate                           | 10        | 23.8        |

Appointment of Qualified Tutors

The ODL tutors are appointed from the teachers of conventional schools located near BOU study centers. They are the part-time tutors. They have no knowledge of ODL as they are teaching in conventional system of education. Figure 1 shows that 69% tutors viewed that BOU did not recruit qualified tutors and only 31% agreed that BOU appointed qualified tutors. This is true that tutors are subject expert but they are not ODL expert. Without the knowledge in ODL, it is difficult to provide academic support and counselling to ODL learners.
Training of Tutors

Tutor is the key contact point of learners and they are the local counsellors and mentors. BOU policy makers think that the tutors of BOU have crucial roles in delivering educational programs and they can play a noticeable role both in recruiting learners and providing quality education. But there is a problem that the tutors are from conventional institutions and they have a very little knowledge and experience on ODL. Therefore, it is crystal clear that BOU tutor needs training.

In the same vein, 78.6% of tutors argued that they did not get training from BOU and only 9.5% told that they got training as shown in Figure 2. The other
11.9% stated tutors got training occasionally. Both the literature and study suggest that training is a crucial need for tutor and it is a major problem of tutoring in offering tutor in a meaningful and effective way.

**Satisfaction on Honorarium**

Tutors are part-time employees of the Bangladesh Open University and as such, they are paid honorarium depending on the tutorial classes attended. The honorarium provided to the tutors was not at satisfactory level as shown in Figure 3.

![Figure 3. Satisfaction on Honorarium](image)

In this study, 85.7% of tutors viewed this honorarium as inadequate and not satisfactory at all. Only 14.3% of tutors thought that this amount of honorarium was somehow alright. It can be said that without meeting financial interest of the tutors, they would hardly provide the tutoring and counselling to the learners effectively. Therefore, dissatisfaction on honorarium by the tutors is a major problem of tutoring at BOU.

**Number of Tutor Classes is Adequate**

Tutoring is the only way of communicating with tutors to learn and understand the course content. Therefore, it is very difficult to cover the whole content of the SSC syllabus within this stipulated time framework of limited contact sessions.
In the same way, 76.8% tutors thought that the number of classes presently available was inadequate to provide tutoring and counselling to the learners of distance mode for SSC programme effectively and successfully. Only 23.8% admitted that this was adequate.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concluded that there were problems of tutoring related to either management or academic. However, these were mainly related to tutor and learner who were the two key players of tutoring in ODL system. This study also argued that there were other problems prevailing in the tutoring system of SSC programme of BOU and that hampered the tutoring to provide academic support.

Recommendations

1. There should be a provision of using ICT in tutorial classes; and learners should have opportunity to communicate with tutors via mobile phone, telephone, email, face-book or other available means of communication.
2. The course materials need to be prepared in a way that the learners should understand the materials by self-reading and supplementary materials such as audio, video and e-materials have to be provided for easy understand of the course contents. In other words, the material should be self-learning materials (SLM).
3. The number of tutorial classes has to be increased so that learners will get more chance for communicating face to face with tutors.
4. The university management should need to develop a policy for recruiting qualified tutors.
5. The present honorarium for tutoring has to be revised and fixed at a satisfactory level of tutors.
6. A policy for training of tutors will need to develop and training should be conducted on ODL system, tutoring and counseling process and other areas of tutoring continuously.

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