

## Assessment on the Quality of Self-Learning Materials of BBS Programme at Bangladesh Open University: Reflections from the Learners

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### Abstract

Bangladesh Open University (BOU) runs Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) programme using the self-learning materials (SLMs), radio-TV broadcasts (RTBs), tutorial support services (TSS). The programme mostly relies on the print which were prepared long back ago and not yet gone through a try-out process. The current research did a quality audit through analysis and evaluation the textbook developed for the BBS and its strengths or weaknesses would have a high impact on BOU students of learning of business. It was therefore important to examine whether it corresponded to the learners' needs of the particular situation, whether it promoted communicative language, learner autonomy, made use of problem solving approaches and whether it allowed for differentiated instructions. The current study uses a 5 point Likert-scale structured questionnaire to acquire the learners' views, attitudes and perceptions on the above areas of the text books. 66 learners were the sample for the study. The study aims to investigate learning and teaching strategies in business through SLMs with particular emphasis on distance learner to the Bangladesh context; to measure the quality of textbooks in relation to familiarity, interestingness, and structural coherence; and to suggest for different approaches to the development of textbook analysis for the BOU. The current research has tremendous implications in the quality assurance process of the BOU.

**Keywords:** *BBS, SLMs, radio-TV*

### Introduction

Bangladesh Open University runs Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) programme for the Open School's learners who did their higher secondary certificate (HSC) on completion of the 12 years of schooling through open schooling and/or from conventional schooling with a view to provide them with a ladder of higher education. The programme extensively uses the self-learning materials (SLMs) as print media and tutorial support services as human media at twice in a month near to the learners' corner. Recently, the programme provides some radio-TV broadcasts and video lectures through BOUTube. Moreover, the programme mostly relies on the print media which must have quality in terms of readability, friendliness, linked to curriculum and

so on. The text materials were prepared when the programme started in 2007. As a matter of fact, these have not yet been gone through a try-out process which is the integral part of the checking the quality of the text materials. Therefore, the current study presents an assessment of the quality of SLMs from the view point of learners. Which is paramount important for the quality assurance of the programme in particular and for the University in general.

### Review of literature

Open and distance learning (ODL) system relies on the self-learning materials (SLMs) as print media, radio-TV broadcast as electronic media and tutorial support services (TSS) for face-to-face contact as

human media and also supports through internet. Quality of these media delivery are ensured in general; but among them the SLMs stays on the top because ODL system extensively depends on the SLMs for it various opportunities. Mannan (2009) states that quality is an incremental process which involves continuous development along with the development of ODL institutions. BOU came into existence long back ago in 1992 and it developed an in-house quality assurance framework which is written in a book entitled 'Text Writing Manual' published by the University. Most of the schools maintain the process of text writing while developing courses of studies. Hopkin (2003) suggests the evolution of quality assurance at three different stages of ODL institutional development: embryonic, evolving and matured stages. BOU has now been at matured stage and it requires acting as champion in quality ODL delivery. Although distance education 'outfit' varies widely from institution to institution and one country to another so that specific quality assurance strategy is not universally adoptable (Olojede, 2008). Again, Maila and Pitsoe (2012) note that the concept 'quality education', seems to be complex and broad in its application, and as mentioned to above, the thought is also contextually grounded. SLMs have to perform the functions of a face-to-face teacher. These materials should be self-paced, flexible, auto-instructional, and economical in time and effort, more interesting and exciting and may be developed within the accessible resources. SLMs have to perform in such a way that the students gain enthusiasm to complete their studies which is imperative to prepare the distance learners more and more self-study. Self-learner can achieve the competence level of conventional system. Interestingly, Rangappa and Narasimharao (2010) point out that open universities are following the footsteps of the conventional education system in treating each stage of the educational system as preparation for the next stage education are producing unemployable graduates. As per their findings, the ODL system has to move from its traditional system into the realm of knowledge society and knowledge based economy following three broad strategies- innovations, borderless education and approaches. This is applicable to the preparation of self-learning materials as well. They focus on writers' responsibility in developing the self learning module for the distance learners. In consistence to this Narasimharao et al (2001) state that giving real world experience is challenging job for course writers. But, this can be done through

proper curriculum planning. The curriculum should focus on using real world knowledge and to be reflected in the SLMs. In this approach the subject cannot be treated in a catalogued fashion. Naidu (1994) found that many of the instructional activities normally associated with conventional face-to-face instruction, such as classroom discussion and immediate and direct feedback that are not easy to provide in the ODL context, the role of the educational materials that are prepared in advance of the learning activity is especially important. So the quality of the teaching and learning process in ODL is dependent on the quality of the study materials. This study aims at measuring the quality of self learning materials in relation to familiarity, interestingness, and structural coherence, investigating learning and teaching strategies in business through SLMs in distance education. Finally, a brief outline suggest for different approaches to the development of SLMs analysis for the BBS programme. This present evaluation study is complementary to the reviewed literature in that the authors examine the attitudes of the students toward SMLs developed for the BBS programme of the BOU.

### **Research methodology**

Research methodology was decided after looking the nature of the research and the objective formulated. Survey method has been employed for this paper. In this method variables described as exactly as possible.

### *Sample of the Study*

Population of the study consist the male and female distant learners from Dhaka and Chittagong RRC of BOU. 66 learners were selected for the sample of the study and the population is of final examinees of the semester. This sample seems to be very reliable and valid as the total number of the BBS programme is about 200 (one year intake) and the nature of the learner is from similar background.

### *Development of tools and data Analysis*

The current study uses a five point Likert-scale structured questionnaire to acquire the learners' views, attitudes and perceptions on the above areas of the text books. In addition, with a 5 point scale: strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1) were included. For the analysis of data of the study used SPSS statistical package. Researchers personally visited the study

centers had discussions with students and administered questionnaire. The findings of the study have been evaluated within mean of every item with dependence to the descriptive case study model and standard deviation was also used to draw conclusions. Mean scores were calculated for each item. In mean scores, higher scores implied the higher effectiveness of video presentations to the student's learning and lower scores implied less effectiveness.

### Discussion and Results

EFA Global Monitoring Report-2005 states that an educational provision is said to be assured quality when it has learners' cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all education systems and has emphasis on their creative and emotional development. It is really to assess. Distance education provision has been more difficult because it relies on variety of media – print, ICT and human contact. Hunt (1998) states that the quality of course delivery influences the quality of learning which in turns permit the identification of criteria for quality of course delivery. Rahman & Panda (2015) identify that BOU heavily relies on print materials and its quality of course delivery is, in turn, depends on quality of SLMs which is required continuous revision. Jayaram & Dorababu, (2015) states that revision of SLMs is to be in the light of the feedback that we obtain from the students, tutors, counselors,

experts and others in order to make the course more relevant, learner friendly and academically rich. DE mostly depends on printed study materials for teaching and learning. Therefore Mishra and Panda (2007) claim that the learners of DE receive pre-designed packets of learning materials that they are supposed to study and to actively engage with as independent learners. Jahan et al. (2015) identify that BOU uses an in-house style for SLMs of different programmes and as part of revision activities, it customizes template recommended by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) for some of its programmes. The field survey reveals the following results for evaluating the SLMs of the BBS programme.

#### *Learners' attitude towards lesson structure (LS)*

Self-learning materials are different from normal texts. While the text book normally has only one 'contents' for the whole book, distance teaching materials have a list of such items for every unit. The list of learning items is called 'structure'. The structure with the help of clearly differentiated and logically arranged sections and subsections, makes the material more learner oriented and learner friendly (Jayaram, K. & Dorababu, 2015), The questionnaire we administered and the section 1 was on structure of the BBS texts. Chart 1 reports the results:

**Chart 1: Learners' attitude towards LS [N = 66]**

Item	N	Mean	SD
The BBS coursebooks are well structured and organized	66	4.33	0.81
The BBS coursebooks' structure is aesthetic and good-looking	59	3.88	1.074
The BBS coursebooks' structure is user friendly	61	4	0.945
The BBS coursebooks' get-up and set-up attracts me to go through it	66	3.83	1.284
The BBS coursebooks use icons that symbolize the linked-theme	57	3.91	1.077
The BBS coursebooks' structure is different from other textbooks in the market	66	4.27	1.001
The BBS coursebooks provides margin space to take notes while reading the content	63	3.23	1.412
I am fond of the structure and I would like to stay with this template	55	3.95	1.059

According to the table 1, the survey reveals that BBS texts are well-structured (mean 4.33 and SD 0.81) and there is strong agreements on get-set up of the books (mean 3.88 and SD 1.074). Again the texts' structure are mostly reader friendly (mean 4 and SD 0.945). Some learners found margin space to take notes does exist as shown by the mean result 3.23. BBS programme has been designed for matured students most of them did open school's pre-

University programmes, say, SSC and HSC and they already used to SLMs in their school level. While conducting focus group discussions, we talked to students regarding the structure of the SLMs. They passed their positive attitudes. Questionnaire was administered after the FGD and that may be main reason for strong agreement towards statements on structure of the SLMs.

**Learners' attitude towards with subject matter (SM)**

BOU follows some principles for ordering the content of the SLMs, they are: to be written in communicative language so that learners can feel their teachers stay with us while reading; each unit are linked with the prior knowledge of learners; constructivist learning theory is applied where

learners can construct new through relating with their previous experience. Authors of the BOU who address learners by the word 'you' for giving a feeling of being paid individual attention. In this way, BOU tries to bring teacher-learner interactive. Such a style of writing influences the attention and interest of the learners.

**Chart 2: Learners' attitude towards with SM [N=66]**

Item	N	Mean	SD
The aims and objectives of the lesson are clear	66	4.36	0.871
The content is written in a lucid language so that I can clearly understand	66	4.26	0.982
The content is discussed linking the objectives set in the lesson's beginning	65	4.17	1.032
I could see how the content of this lesson linked with other lessons	64	4	1.095
Examples in the content are based on Bangladesh context	65	3.86	1.162
Font size is appropriate to read	66	4.12	1.045
There are pictorial presentation where needed	66	3.59	1.252
There are gender-sensitive discussion in the lessons	62	4.12	1.031
Activities in the content are linked to the theoretical aspects of the lesson	66	3.85	1.193

Participants showed a positive attitude regarding clear objectives of the textbooks (mean 4.36 and SD 0.871) as shown in table 2. This table also shows that learners agreed that the content of the textbooks' language are lucid with mean result 4.26. As a result they can easily linking the content with the objectives in the beginning of the lesson (mean 4.17 and SD 1.032).

**Learners' attitude towards self-assessed questions (SAQs)**

Assessment in the ODL system is a multi-task activity unlike in the face-to-face system. Unique practices are managed to assess students' performance such as: self-assessment (students assess themselves by evaluating their performance when they read SLMs), peer assessment (mutual assessment can be practiced), academic tutors to assess assignment (formative evaluation), external

examiner for project and practical assessment (part of summative evaluation) in term-end examination (Chaudhary & Dey, 2013). BOU texts do not have pre-test to assess learner's pre-knowledge; but in the introduction, there is a welcome address where there are some sort of indication of what they learnt before for linking the prior knowledge. The SAQs within a textbook act as a replacement of a teacher which is a teacher's question in the classroom for getting feedback. SAQs provide feedback to the learners to revise information to support learning. They get feedback as soon as they matched the answers. In addition, there are two types of evaluation in BBS programmes such as continuous evaluation through tutor marked/practical assignments and semester-end evaluation through semester-end examination. Chart 3 reports results on the SAQs:

**Chart 3: Learners' attitude towards SAQs [N=66]**

Item	N	Mean	SD
Self-assessed questions (SAQs) are well linked to the aims and objectives of the lesson	65	4.08	1.027
The SAQ criteria are based on the content	64	4.29	0.739
I receive feedback on my reading after completion of the SAQs	61	3.88	1.089
SAQs are of mixed innature i.e. the MCQs, short questions, easy-type questions, etc.	66	4.17	1.075
SAQs are well-structured and motivates me to exercise on it	66	3.8	1.011

BBS books contain SAQs which are well-linked to the lesson objectives (mean, 4.08 & SD, 1.027) and based on the content as is shown in the strong agreement by the respondents (mean, 4.29 & SD, 0.739). Mix of SAQs provides learners with appropriate feedback and gaining motivation (mean, 3.8 & SD, 1.011). In this way, they have the reinforcement and learning experiences.

#### **Learners' attitude towards quality of teaching-based module (TBMs)**

Self-learning materials or modules are designed for learners to study individually with less assistance from other learners of conventional universities. The texts are designed in consistent with the curriculum – the blueprint of the programme – for ensuring the programmed learning. Therefore, SLMs do have lucid language, subjected time to finish, interactivity and reinforcement. Chart 4 reports the results on learners' agreements on teaching-based module:

**Chart 4: Learners' attitude towards with TBMs [N=66]**

<b>Item</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>The coursebooks are written effectively so that the learners can understand the content through self-study</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>4.32</b>	<b>0.844</b>
<b>I can finish the lesson within the time allocated for reading</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>3.36</b>	<b>1.377</b>
<b>I need further help from my tutors, and/or private shadow teachers for some of the lessons and I attend tutorial lesson for this reason</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>0.899</b>
<b>There was sufficient opportunities for interaction between me and my teacher in the texts as it is written in communicative language</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>3.71</b>	<b>1.004</b>
<b>The coursebooks have learning experiences in the texts so that I can get reinforcement</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>1.126</b>
<b>The lesson provides hints for terminal examination</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>3.73</b>	<b>1.117</b>

Learners showed their strong agreement on appropriateness for self-study (mean, 4.32 & SD, 0.844) and there is strong supports on reading within the suggested time (3.36 & SD, 1.377). While reading the learners feel proximity of the teachers (mean, 3.71 & SD, 1.004); in spite of that they require help from the shadow teachers (mean, 4.5 & SD, 0.899). The contents are along with the activities what let the learners with the reinforcement (3.15 & SD, 1.126). In this way, BBS materials are of teaching-based modules.

#### **Learners' attitude towards supplementary learning resources (SLRs)**

The suggestion is that the listed books should be useful for the learner and should be easily available at reasonable prices. The content should be simple and readable so that the learners can get something more out of these books. Martins (2012) conducted a survey with distance and face-to-face learners and the results indicate a strong reliance on the textbook as a study resource for the students of both systems and the results also offer a number of proposals for the use and development of textbooks and other supporting resources.

**Chart 5: Learners' attitude towards with SLRs [N=66]**

<b>Item</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>The coursebooks are effectively supported by tutorial sessions and/or on-line resources</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>2.17</b>	<b>1.09</b>
<b>The coursebooks provide information on other books in the market as supplementary materials</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>2.06</b>	<b>1.006</b>
<b>The coursebooks provide information for other ICT materials such as audio/video CDs or memory cards for further study</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>2.29</b>	<b>1.298</b>
<b>The coursebooks provide information on radio-TV broadcasts of the selected lessons</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>1.58</b>	<b>0.725</b>
<b>The coursebooks provide information on web-link for use open educational resources (OERs) for further study</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>1.76</b>	<b>0.86</b>

BBS texts are supposed to be programmed materials and in addition to the content, it needs to provide

learners' information for other readings what is known as referenced materials. There is strong

disagreement by the learners and results show the mean value less than 3. BOU's broadcast programmes are already in the BOU Tube. The texts do not provide any clue about these supplementary materials.

**Learners' attitude towards tutor-marked assignments (TMAs)**

TMAs are one of the important tools for learners of DE to engage the learners in the process of teaching-

learning. The students' comments on TMAs are quite useful for the learners to know their strengths and weaknesses and accordingly improve their performance in future. Tutor's comments on TMAs reinforce learning. Then the sense of isolation of both the learner and the tutor/academic counselor is reduced. The assignments provide feedback to both the teacher and the learners. This is called continuous assessment.

**Table 6: Learners' attitude towards with TMAs [N=66]**

Item	N	Mean	SD
The assignment questions are based on the content of the book	66	4.35	0.886
I can prepare the assignment only with the help of the coursebooks	64	4.06	1.021
I use other reference materials to prepare my assignment	66	4.17	0.938
The coursebooks have sufficient information on how to prepare assignment	59	3.47	1.28
The coursebooks provide information about the submission and collection dates for the assignment	62	1.7	1.037

The survey reveals that learners agreed that assignment questions are based on the content of the text (mean 4.35 and 0.886). But their disagreement shows that course materials do not provide any information about the submission and collection dates for the TMAs (mean 1.7 and SD 1.037). As a result, sometimes learners failed to submit their TMAs in due time.

**Further Research Direction**

The textbook is a critical component of learning design used to reposition and facilitate learning across all sectors of education. Most of distance education setting is now delivering SMLs through web and a typology needs to be developed to dictate for open educational resources (OER) the existing SLMs for exploring the future role of the textbook in blended learning spaces. The future research on dictating materials for blended BBS for effective use is being made of technology to improve the learning experience of students.

**Conclusion**

SLM constitutes the backbone of teaching through the distance education system. Even distance education institutes in advanced countries changed their educational setting through extensive use of ICTs, the printed course material is still the most important means of imparting instruction to learners at a distance. Therefore, quality of text is important and it needs to be taken to ensure academic standard while preparing the course

material. BBS texts are found good quality and it needs to be reviewed as it is prepared long back ago and how to revise those materials periodically should be familiar with all the important terms relevant to the process of ODL and the results of our research will be of valuable to them. In learning at a distance programme like BBS, to make communication simple, effective and directive is imperative. It's the creativity of the course writer to decide, based on his previous experiences related to the level of language for the target students. Also learner's educational background, intellectual growth and maturity of thought mainly determine the difficulty level. Thus, BOU should write in a simple, plain and lucid language. BOU needs to incorporate some reference materials and updated information in the texts while revising.

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