ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Education

Volume - 7 | Issue - 4 | April-2017 | ISSN - 2249-555X | IF : 4.894 | IC Value : 79.96

Quality of Distance B Ed Program of Bangladesh Open University and Its Determinants

KEYWORDS

input, process and output variables, opinion, attitude.

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ABSTRACT This article presents the findings of a survey conducted for evaluating the quality of the determinants of distance BEd program of BOU. The systems approach i.e. the input, process and output model of evaluation technique was applied for this purpose. The findings revealed that the quality of majority of the determinants, listed under input and process variables, was not satisfactory. Despite this deficiency, the output of the BEd i.e. the teaching competency of the distance BEd was found satisfactory compared to that of the Govt. TTC students. Their teaching performance was almost of same standard to that of the govt. They also revealed positive attitude to the BEd program. It indicates that the distance BEd program of BOU could achieve its' one of the prime objectives of providing secondary teacher training satisfactorily as was done by the govt. TTCs. The quality of distance B Ed could be further enhanced if the quality of its determinants raise more. So, BOU importantly needs to adopt necessary measures to uplift the quality of its determining factors by minimizing the deficiencies as have been identified in this study.

1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The distance Bachelor of Education (BEd) program, offered by Bangladesh Open University (BOU), has passed nearly two decades of its journey since its inception in 1992. During this period a good number, 28,832 up to 2006 (Examination Division, BOU, 2010), of B Ed graduates came out successfully and many of them are working in secondary schools, both private-public and rural- urban, located in different corners of the country. Although quality is a major challenge for distance education (DE), over this long period of the inception of the BEd of BOU, there developed no formal quality auditing or controlling measures of the BEd program, although assuring its' quality is a matter of growing concern to many (Akhter 2008: 1- 4, Hossain and Islam 2007: 99). The distance BEd program of BOU, therefore, was subjected to a quality auditing by the researcher in order to evaluate the efficiency of its course delivery. It was done through assessing some of the predicting variables, responsible for determining the quality of any teacher education program like BEd, particularly in distance mode. The systems approach i.e. an input-process-output model of investigation was employed for this purpose. This article presents the findings of this study, which represents a mixed scenario, both positive and negative, characterized with distance BEd program delivery. BOU can reap benefits taking into cognizance the feedback received from it and taking measures accordingly.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

Quality has become a defining element of any education in 21st century education. As open and distance learning (ODL) is evolving remarkably, quality of its course provision has also become a major concern. According to Belawati and Zuhuri, quoted in Belawati (2010:49), "As a result of consumers' increasing demands for high-quality education, quality assurance (QA) has become a major concern of educational leaders, policy-makers and teachers and has become a fundamental aspect of ODL planning and management." Quality assurance has therefore become vital aspect of the distance BEd program of BOU. The findings of this study can help to identify the factors, where changes and interventions are necessary.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

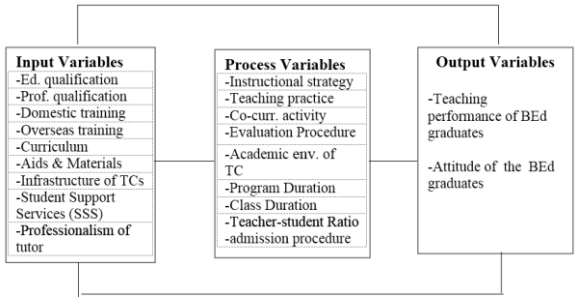
The prime goal of this study was to evaluate the quality of the determinants of distance BEd program of BOU. The specific objectives were to:

1. assess the quality of the factors responsible for effective delivery of the distance BEd program;
2. assess the quality of the BEd program in terms of the teaching performance of the distance BEd graduates in real classroom situation.
3. identify the attitude of the BEd graduates towards the distance B Ed program.
4. determine the impact of various determining factors on teaching quality and attitude of the distance BEd graduates.
5. suggest measures to improve the overall quality of the distance B Ed program.

1.4 Scope of the Study

As illustrated in following framework, the systems approach i.e. an input-process and output model of analysis was done to determine the quality of the distance education

Figure 1: Framework of the Scope of the Study



program, as according to UNESCO (1979:36) systems approach is one of the best approaches in evaluation of a teacher education program. For this a number of input, process and output variables were identified from literature search, which were generally responsible for quality assurance of a distance teacher education program. The quality of each of the variables as well as the prediction of the input and process variables on out put of the BEd were assessed separately, which worked as the basis of quality judgment of the BEd program.

2. Methodology

Research Design: The study made use of the empirical research design of descriptive type. The quantitative method of investigation was used to elicit data from the respondents. Besides, it used triangulation under which multiple sources were used to collect data for same investigation.

Sample and Sampling Procedure: A multi-stage sampling was applied for this study. Firstly, six BEd tutorial centers (TCs) out of 15, located in different corners of the country, were chosen following a random sampling technique. Then all the TC coordinators (6 Principals) and all the tutors (96 teacher educators) of the selected TCs were chosen as data source. In addition 48 BEd graduates/ex-students (24 graduated from the six BEd tutorial center and 24

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passed from the govt. TTCs of face to face mode education)) were included in the sample of the study. Thus, the sample consists four groups of respondents (BOU BEd graduates, Govt. TTC BEd graduates, distance BEd tutors and distance B Ed tutorial centre coordinators), which was 150 in total (24+24+96+06).

Instrumentation and Data Collection: The tools used in this study included three questionnaires, one observation checklist and an attitude scale. The questionnaires were designed to get opinion of the three groups (BEd graduates, tutors, TC coordinators) of respondents about the quality of the nine input and the nine process variables as mentioned in the scope of the study. The observation checklist was designed to evaluate the teaching performance of both the distance BEd graduates and the face to face BEd graduates in their working classrooms. The teaching competency of both the groups were assessed to determine the level of teaching quality of the distance BEd graduates compared to that of the face to face BEd graduates. The attitude scale was administered on the selected distance BEd graduates to know their feelings about the quality of the distance BEd they completed.

Data Analysis: The quantitative data analysis was done by following both descriptive (percentage and mean) and inferential statistical (multiple regression analysis) methods. In analyzing the data, point '3' was considered as the criterion value for deciding the level (positive or negative) of opinion and attitude of the respondents about BEd and its determinants. In doing so, values equivalent to '3' or above were considered positively and those below '3' were treated as negative value.

3. Findings and Analysis

3.1 Educational Qualifications of the Distance BEd Tutors and the Tutorial Center Coordinators

Table 1: Educational Qualifications of the Tutorial Center Coordinators and the Tutors of the Distance B Ed Program

Respondents	Total	Master		Mphil		PhD	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
B Ed TC Coordinator	6	6	100	-	-	-	-
Tutor	96	92	95.83	3	3.13	1	1.40

The data in Table 1 reveal that all the TC coordinators were master degree holders. Of the 96 B Ed tutors working in the six TCs, 95.83% possessed master degree, 3.13% MPhil and 1.40% PhD. The findings explicitly indicate that very few BEd tutors had higher education and none of the TC coordinators obtained degree beyond master.

3.2 Professional Qualifications of the Tutors and TC Coordinators

Table 2: Professional Qualifications of the Tutorial Center Coordinators and the Tutors of the Distance B Ed Program

Respondents	Total	BEd		BEd+MEd		None	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
B Ed Coordinator	6	2	33.33	-	-	-	-
Tutor	96	96	100	46	47.17	-	-

As evident in Table 2, two-thirds of the BEd tutorial center coordinators had at all no professional degree, like BEd/MEd. But the scenario of the tutor was different. All of them obtained B Ed. Additionally 47.17% of the tutors received MEd. This finding leads to infer that the BEd tutors were armored with required professional educational background, while majority of the TC coordinators were not. This was due to the distance BEd regulatory provision, which has made BEd mandatory for becoming a tutor of it, but it is not mandatory for the TC coordinator, which created opportunity for people without BEd to become implementation manager of the BEd. This is not an ideal situation for effective and quality implementation of a professional program like BEd, which is very much technical and demands special care, particularly in terms of practical aspects. An implementation manager having adequate professional background can realize easily the special demands of the program and can act accordingly. But, this is not happening as found in qualitative findings of this study.

3.3 In-service Training Status of the Tutors and TC Coordinators

All the BEd TC coordinators received professional level in-service training of domestic type. A half of them obtained overseas training. Of the tutors, nearly 72% got domestic training and 26.04% received overseas training. The areas of their training were varied ranging from pedagogy to subject content, educational technologies and in some general areas. Interestingly, all of the training areas were related to face to face training and none of the coordinators and a few, merely 3.13%, of the tutors received training on open and distance program and learning delivery. This certainly expresses a depressing scenario of distance BEd tutoring. The tutorial delivery system of open and distance learning is technically different from face to face teaching. If tutors are not oriented with the special requirements of ODL and its delivery process, definitely transaction of tutorial service will suffer from quality delivery (Akhter, 2008:5-8).

Table 3: In-service Training Received by the Tutorial Center Coordinators and the Tutors of the Distance BEd Program

Respondents	Total	Domestic		Overseas		Training in ODL	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
B Ed Coordinator	6	6	100	3	50.00	-	-
Tutor	96	69	71.88	25	26.04	3	3.13

3.4 Opinion of the Respondents about the Quality of the Various Determinants under Input and Process Variables

The findings on input variables show that all the three groups of respondents were satisfied with the infrastructural facilities of the BEd tutorial centers, although their opinion were not much higher than the criterion mean (3). All of their opinions towards student support services and about use of instructional aids and technologies in distance BEd tutorial delivery were negative. Their opinions towards these two variables were even much lower than the criterion mean. Regarding the state of tutor's professionalism and BEd curriculum the tutors and BEd graduate's held negative views, while the coordinators were positive. However, the overall opinion about BEd curriculum was negative, while it was positive for tutor's professionalism.

Under the process variables, majority of the performance indicators were viewed negatively by all the three groups of the respondents. All the three groups of respondents were totally negative about the first four indicators, namely tutorial delivery methods and techniques; teaching practice; evaluation procedure and co-curricular activities. All the three groups were much positive about academic environment of the TCs and BEd program duration which was two years. Regarding class duration and teacher-student ratio two groups were found negative and one group positive. Regarding the quality of admission procedure the tutors were apparently holding negative opinion.

Table 5: Mean Opinion Scores of Different Respondent Groups about the Quality of Various Predicting Variables

Variables	BEd Graduates	Tutors	TC Coordinators	Total (Average of column 3, 4 & 5)
Input Variables				
Curriculum	2.74	2.68	3.21	**2.88**
Infrastructure of the TCs	3.29	3.45	3.32	**3.35**
Student Support Services	1.75	1.96	2.31	**2.01**
Professionalism	2.81	2.99	3.42	**3.27**
Instructional Aids and Technologies	2.28	1.96	2.22	**2.15**

Volume - 7 | Issue - 4 | April-2017 | ISSN - 2249-555X | IF : 4.894 | IC Value : 79.96

Process Variables				
Tutorial Delivery methods and Techniques	2.90	2.74	2.61	**2.75**
Teaching Practice	2.79	2.96	2.75	**2.83**
Evaluation Procedure	2.66	2.84	2.35	**2.62**
Co-curricular Activities	2.50	2.38	1.91	**2.26**
Academic Environment of TCs	3.51	3.61	3.61	**3.58**
Program Duration	3.63	3.67	3.83	**3.71**
Class duration	2.96	2.67	3.00	**2.88**
Tutor-student Ratio	3.00	2.88	2.33	**2.74**
Admission Procedure	3.38	2.50	3.50	**3.13**

The findings on total opinion against the input variables clearly demonstrate an unfavorable scenario regarding the quality of the determinants of distance BEd program. The data reveal that the respondents, as a whole, perceived poorly three (curriculum; student support services and method and technologies) out of five factors under the input variables. They were the most critical of the student support services provided to the students followed by the aids and technologies used in the BEd program delivery and had the highest level of satisfaction about the infrastructural facilities of the tutorial centers.

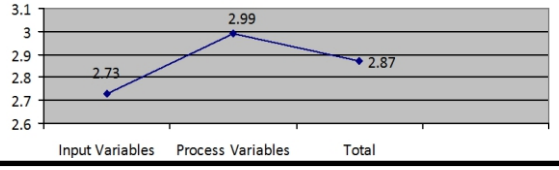
The data on total opinion about the process variables reveal the similar scenario of that of input variables. There, the respondents were found dissatisfied about the overall standard of two-thirds of the process variables. They expressed dissatisfaction about tutorial methods and techniques; teaching practice; co-curricular activities; evaluation procedure; class duration and tutor-student ratio. The respondents had positive opinion towards only three process variables, namely academic environment; program duration and admission procedure. Overall the respondents had the highest satisfaction about the BEd program duration and the lowest about the state of co-curricular activities.

Aggregating the opinions of the three groups of respondents, under the input and process variables, it was found that the respondents were positive about five variables and negative about nine variables. The respondents had the highest satisfaction about the environment of the TCs followed by program duration and both were from process variables category. The least perceived two variables were students support services followed by use of instructional aids and technologies in course delivery process, which fall in input category. As was mentioned by Dekkers (1994:19) BOU, from its very inception, is holding very weak position in providing student support service. Still the problem is persisting (Ahmmod 2005:37; William and Akhter, 2006:21) and needs to be handled with utmost importance. Because students support service is the most crucial part of any distance education delivery process. The use of educational technologies in distance BEd of BOU also needs to be enhanced as information and communication technologies has brought a revolution in education and has become an integral part of open and distance education in present era.

3.5 Overall Opinion about the Quality of the Distance BEd Program and in terms of Input and Process Variables

Figure 2 exhibits the status of the respondent's overall opinion about the quality of input and the process variables as well as of the overall quality of the distance BEd program. The findings explicitly indicate that the respondents overall were not happy about the

Figure 2: Opinion about the Overall Quality of Input and Process Variables and the Total Opinion of the Respondents



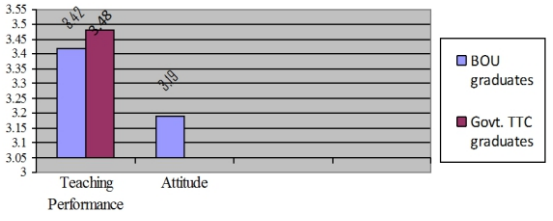
quality of the BEd from all the three aspects (input, process and total). This clearly expresses a poor state of quality of the BEd. But, to make a whole system properly functional and to reap quality output different parts of it need to work efficiently, both independently and in relation to other variables. Also the efficiency of process variables depends largely on efficiency of input variables. Similarly the quality of output of a program is dependent on the quality of input and process variables. BOU, therefore, need to be careful to make all the parts of the BEd equally functional.

The analysis of qualitative data also found supportive of the findings on quantitative data under the input and process variables. The respondents reported of a number of strengths and deficiencies of the variables, subjected to investigation. They were very much happy of the offering modality, admission procedure, tutors' professionalism, but critique of BEd curriculum, student support services, teaching practice, instructional delivery in the tutorial class, use of technology and media. They demanded immediate measures to improve the situation and to offer them a quality professional education of distance mode. They mentioned because of the distance BEd they were able to posses a professional degree easily. But, quality is a concern. They need to have such a programme which will not create a question of quality and must posses a wide acceptability.

3.6 Findings on Output Variables

As mentioned in the framework of scope, the output of the BEd was evaluated by assessing the teaching performance of the distance BEd graduates and compared it with the teaching capacity of the face to face mode graduates. The observation was done through an observation scale, which included various items required for effective teaching and is supposed to teach and learn through a BEd. Also the attitude of the distance BEd graduates towards the quality of their BEd was measured. Figure three gives a sketch of the results on status of the BEd graduate's (distance and face to face mode) teaching performance and the distance BEd graduates' attitude towards overall quality of the distance BEd program.

Figure 3: Teaching Performance of the BOU (Distance mode) and Govt. TTC (Face to Face mode) BEd Graduates in Real School Situation and the Attitude of the BOU Graduates towards Quality of the Distance BEd Program



The findings show that alike the performance (3.48) of face to face BEd graduates, the distance BEd graduate's teaching performance (3.42) was satisfactory. Their performance was close to the performance of face to face BEd and there found no significant difference between the two. This is surely a significant positive finding, which apparently indicates despite deficiency in quality of the input and process factors, the distance BEd was able to develop almost equal level of teaching competencies in its graduates.

The data on attitude of the respondents towards the BEd program show that the BEd graduates although held positive view (3.19) towards the quality of the BEd program, but there level of attitude was not at all high.

The findings indicate a contrasting scenario between the respondent's opinions regarding the quality of different input and the process variables, where the respondents demonstrated negative views in terms of majority of the input and process variables, and their teaching performance which was apparent of almost same level

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of that of face to face BEd. This mismatch naturally raises a question about the reliability of the finding of this study, as in normal situation the expected scenario is that the higher the quality of various performance indicators of a system, the higher the quality of its output or product. However, to defend this finding it could be said despite the lacking of BOU in the capacity of delivering its BEd with optimum quality, the distance BEd recipients could learn well through the BEd course offering out of their strong motivation and self attempts. This perhaps happened due to the flexibility of distance education, which offered a unique opportunity to them to continue their study and obtain a professional degree without hampering their familial, working and social life. These opportunities of distance BEd possibly motivated them to achieve the required teaching competencies and to cope with their studies. The positive but comparatively lower level of attitude also may be arisen from the same reason i.e. poor program delivery process.

Based on the findings it could be said that BOU should be careful to escalate the quality of BEd, in terms of the identified weaknesses, in order to meet the challenge of 21st century as quality of education has become crucial of the quantum change in the socio-economic context the world over (OUSL, 2006:1). Specially, BOU should take immediate measure to improve the quality of its input variables as efficiency of any program delivery significantly depends on it.

3.3 Impact of Input and Process Variables on Teaching Performance and Attitude of the Distance BEd Graduates

The summary of stepwise multiple regression analysis of the input and process variables for the prediction of teaching performance and attitude of the graduates are presented in the following table. The findings reveal that the total combined impact of the following eight input variables on BEd graduate's performance was only 26.3%. It was 29.73% for the nine process variables. Curriculum had the highest impact (15.1%) on the graduates' teaching performance. The impact on teaching performance exerted by other variables were: teacher student ration in tutorial classroom 15.03%, tutors' educational qualifications(3.0%), student support service 2.5%, tutorial methods and techniques 1.8%, teaching practice 2.2%, admission procedure 4.6% and program duration 2.9%.

On attitude of the graduates, the combined impact of the input and process variables were 47.5% and 83.20%. Admission procedure had the highest impact (30.4%) on the graduate's attitude. Evaluation procedure (20.2%), professionalism of the tutors (20.0%), teaching practice(14.8%), instructional aids and technologies(12.9%) also exerted significant impact on their attitude.

Table 6: Extent of Impact on the Teaching Performance of the Distance BEd Graduates and their Attitude towards Distance BEd Program

Variables	Prediction of Performance	Prediction of Attitude
Input variables		
Ed. Qualification	3.00	4.10
Prof. Qualification	1.00	1.20
In-service Training	1.80	1.00
Curriculum	15.10	3.00
Student Support Service	2.50	4.40
Professionalism of the Tutor	0.90	20.00
Infrastructure	1.00	0.90
Aids and Technologies	1.00	12.90
Combined Prediction	**26.30**	**47.50**
Process Variables		
Tutorial Delivery	1.80	5.10
Teaching Practice	2.20	14.80
Co-curricular Activities	0.70	8.00
Academic Environment	1.00	1.90
Evaluation Procedure	0.80	20.20
Admission Procedure	4.60	30.4
Class Duration	0.70	0.80
Teacher-student Ratio	15.03	1.00
Program Duration	2.90	1.00
Combined Prediction	**29.73**	**83.20**

The above findings indicate curriculum had the highest impact on teaching performance and admission procedure was the best influencing factor of the attitude of the distance BEd students. Also a number of other variables, as mentioned above, had some impact on the quality of distance BEd output (teaching performance and attitude). So, Bangladesh Open University needs to take care of these determinants of its BEd program.

4. Conclusion

The findings presented in the previous section lead to conclude that BOU's performance was not up to the mark in a number of input and process variables involved in distance BEd program delivery process. Student support services and use of instructional aids and technologies in tutorial delivery represented a dismal quality scenario of the BEd. The other weak areas were curriculum, teaching practice, tutorial delivery methods and techniques, evaluation procedure, tutorial class duration, co-curricular activities and tutor-student ratio in tutorial session. One significant deficiency was lack of training of the BEd tutors on ODL system. All these are vital determinants of quality in distance BEd program and defying the factors quality can never be achieved. Technology, specially information and communication technology (ICT) should form an integral part of the BEd. Because, ICT can establish both synchronous and asynchronous communication which can particularly improve the quality by increasing opportunities for active communication between instructor and learner and among the learners (Jamtsho and Bullen, 2010:57).

Another significant findings was that the overall quality of input and process variables were poor and the quality of input factors was poorer than that of the process factor. Input and process factors exert tremendous impact on output of a system, especially on its quality. According to UNESCO (2002:81) quality is a multi-faceted concept. It encompasses how learning is organized and managed, what the content of learning is, what level of learning is achieved, what it leads to in terms of outcomes, and what goes on in the learning environment. So, without improvement of them, quality of the program can not be ascertained.

The study obtained some positive experiences. The distance BEd graduates could achieve good pedagogical competencies despite poor status of majority of the input and process variables. The quality of their teaching performance was almost close to that of the govt. TTC graduates. They also demonstrated positive attitude towards BEd but it was that much high. This lower level of attitude perhaps developed from the poor quality of input and process variables. Despite it could be inferred that distance education is a vital and effective mode of teacher training. So, BOU needs to explore the pathways for improving the quality of its BEd as have been identified in this study. Another positive finding needs to mention is that distance BEd is attracting more number of young people than before. It indicates that the momentum of distance BEd is increasing. But, this should not be the end. The quality of the BEd must be ensured to hold this momentum. For this a quality assurance frame work should be developed and maintained properly as has been developed and being in many ODL universities of Asia and the world. This can help BOU's BEd to proceed further in terms of quality, which is a defining element of every thing in present society.

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