EVALUATING THE QUALITY OF BLENDED BEd PROGRAMME:
A CASE OF BANGLADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY

Sabina Yeasmin1, Md. Mizanoo Rahman2 & Khondoker Mokaddem Hossain3

1,2,3 Open School, Bangladesh Open University, Gazipur 1705 Bangladesh
e-mail: sabina.koly@gmail.com, mizan2006@yahoo.com, mokaddemdu@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, quality assurance of basic degree of teacher education has become a great concern in general and of teacher education programme under blended mode in particular. The later leverages information and communication technology (ICT) for blending the *modus operandi* which provides more concerns about the quality. This paper addresses the quality of BEd programme of the School of Education (SOE) of Bangladesh Open University (BOU). The main purpose of this study was to evaluate the quality of BEd programme with regard to the internal efficiency of School of Education of BOU. This study was conducted by the The Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in association of the BLTeae team and the survey was done on a random sample of 252 BEd students drawn from 11 Regional Centres (RCs) located throughout the country using the common instrument by the University Grant Commission (UGC) with some modification considering the delivery mode of the programme. Data was collected through a questionnaire with 5 point Likert-Scale which was validated through a pilot study. The results exposed that BEd programme was effective in terms of uplifting teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and skills. Teachers responded favorably the quality of BEd curriculum, lesson planning and presentation by themselves and their teacher educators, and had some reservations about the appropriate use of video lectures for effective blended teaching learning processes.

INTRODUCTION

Recognition of curriculum for the teacher education programme is very important because teachers get fringe benefit after acquiring the BEd or MEd degree from any university in Bangladesh. The curriculum for the teacher education programme was varied from the university to university. For instance, Bangladesh Open University [1] is the only provider of distance education with 2-year BEd programme, National University have affiliating university for colleges and offered one-year BEd and Dhaka University offers 4-year BEd (honors) degrees. Private universities were also allowed to run 1-year BEd degree with different curriculum. Therefore, government felt to develop unified curriculum. Again, there were questions on the quality of BEd degree by different providers. In addition, there is no central strategic authority to look at the quality assurance, development and
coordination aspects of teacher education. This makes it difficult to achieve consistent standards [2]. To respond these, government established Non-Government Teachers Registration and Certification Authority (NTRCA), in 2005, to ensure quality education by appointing quality teachers. By this time, government already formed an apex body for affiliating the BEd degree throughout the nation, and as per the law, all providers of teacher education shall need to follow single curriculum. This paper discusses the implementation of the National BEd program of the School of Education of BOU under the apex body through Blended Learning (BL) mode. It also discusses the assessment experiences on the quality of BEd programme of Bangladesh Open University.

**Background of BEd Programme**

**National BEd**

The NCRTA Act is to ensures the School Management Committee (SMCs) and Governing Body’s (GBs) appoint quality teacher or lecturer in a Non-government school or college. The Act is responsible to ensure the quality teachers in 28,000 non-government educational institutions of the country. The NTRCA issues certificates to successful candidates who qualify in the teacher’s registration examination. Persons certified at this body are entitled to apply for teaching positions in non-government education institutions. An SMC/GB has the right to choose any one from the applicants either ones registered at NTRCA. Section 10 of the Act has specified the tasks to be performed by NTRCA. The act is to ensure a system of quality improvement through training (National BEd) for those teachers who has been appointed as teachers and granted salary subvention before the Act was implemented [3]. The Body has already been approved by the Government and it is entrusted to monitor BEd and MEd programs offered by different universities and colleges so that the quality of the graduates is commensurate with national goal of providing quality teachers in all educational institutions. Asian Development Bank financed TQI (Teaching Quality Improvement) project is to improve the quality of initial and in-service teacher training, including professional development, to all eligible teachers of grades 6-10 in government and private secondary schools in achieving country’s Education-for-All Goals and the Millennium Development Goals. TQI already developed texts based-on the curriculum and distributed to all TTCs for implementing the National BEd program under the National University. In Bangladesh, secondary teacher training is being imparted by about 108 TTCs, IER, BOU and 3-5 private universities [2]. Finally, as it is law, BOU incorporated the 1-year National BEd instead of its 2-year comprehensive BEd programme.

To train 28,000 teachers of the non-government institutions has become very costly and TQI partnered with BOU for alternative cost-effective way as Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is the only cost-effective system of education. Raza and
Allsop [4] state that cost efficiency is the strongest selling point for distance education and it has been appealed most to education planners in the low-income countries. Perraton [5] says that ODL has high fixed cost but low variable costs. In this way, BOU has become very productive for the TQI and it has a countrywide well-established network. Just pushing with the variable cost that is using the revenue budget, it can be the best institute to partner for imparting the National BEd. SoE Dean reported that there were some misunderstandings, at the initial stage, between two in adopting new curriculum instead of existing BOU BEd. National BEd launched in July 2008 and ratified in the Academic Council on 26 September 2007. By this time, texts materials have already been developed. Actually, texts were customized, which were developed for the face-to-face mode at the TTCs, private universities, for the ODL mode. BOU is extensively using the government TTCs as tutorial centers and their laboratory schools are for teaching practice (TP). BOU runs this BEd through blended approach where TTCs run face-to-face (F2F) contacts including TPs, and SOE of BOU customized SLMs and video lectures which are made available in the BOU OER Repository.

Objectives

Self-assessment is the heart of quality audit of any programme and/or course, and subsequently, the external auditor validates the self-assessment report. IQAC already prepared a self-assessment report and submitted to the competent authority. The main purpose of this study is to evaluate the quality of BEd programme with regard to the internal efficiency of School of Education of BOU. It includes evaluate the teacher education curriculum, admission and learners’ performance, performance of teaching-learning and learners’ support services, assessment.

METHODOLOGY

Instrument

The Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) (IQAC-BOU) customized the instrument developed by the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) of University Grant Commission (UGC). UGC runs a project titled ‘Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP)’ funded by the World Bank and managed by the Ministry of Education (SoE). QAU of the HEQEP developed a generic instrument for self-assessment of quality of member universities (private and public). This instrument actually was developed for conventional i.e. face to face university. But BOU is an ODL (open and distance learning) university and incidentally, IQAC-BOU, the HEQEP commissioned-project, customized the generic instrument for the distance
education courses for the self-assessment of the programmes. The current research used the data collected by the IQAC-BOU with due permission from the Prof. Mohshin Unddin, Project Director to use the self-assessment data of the BEd programme. UGC questionnaire has been huge and portion has been used in this research. In addition, the first author is the member of the IQAC and in this way; instrument is seemed to be well-designed and covered all aspects of research questions. The questionnaire was structured in two parts and it addresses demographic and the self-assessment of the programmes (curriculum – content, design and review, admission and achievements, student support services, assessment). The questionnaire comprises of a range of answer choices (multiple-choice, Likert-type scale and open-ended) to enable participants to indicate preferences, attitude and to elaborate on their views and practices. In addition, some ‘yes’ ‘no’ questions are also set in the instruments. Some questions also directly asked the options which actually meant for. IQAC piloted questionnaire after modification of the generic questionnaire with a small group (n = 10) and ambiguity in the questions were rewritten. Two ODL experts also checked the questionnaire.

In addition, document analysis also been deployed in this study along with the survey with the learners.

**Participants**

There were 107 female and 145 male who studied at the blended BEd of the School of Education of BOU involved in the study. Figure 1 illustrates the gender of data collection.

![Figure 1. Female-Male Ratio of Participants](image)

Half (50%) of the students were aged older than 30, 44% were 20-30, and 6% 40-50. Figure 2 illustrates the age group of study participants.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

School of Education runs the national BEd programme through blended mode where self-learning materials are stored in the OER repository; video lectures in BOUTube and face to face contacts. For the first time, quality of the national BEd is reviewed by the IQAC and this was commissioned by the UGC. According the framework following criteria are covered in this study:

Teacher Education Curriculum

The curriculum comprises the entire courses of studies of the BEd programme, say, curriculum structure including the course content, design and development of module i.e. the e-books stored in the repository. Teacher education curriculum needs to cover the national aims and desires what it wants to achieve through education. Teacher education (TE) or teacher training (TT) is actually an umbrella term. It refers to the policies, procedures, and provision designed to equip (prospective) teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school, and wider community. The professionals who engage in this activity are called teacher educators (or, in some contexts, teacher trainers) [6]. That’s why; once you say the evaluation of teacher education it comprises the policy analysis, procedural analysis, and the analysis of provisions. This paper concentrated only on procedural analysis i.e. the analysis of quality assurance of delivery of BEd programme under Blended Learning mode where there is a convergence of face-to-face classroom teaching and distance learning. Kagoda and Ezati [7] found that the curriculum of the teacher training colleges is not tailored to the requirements of the primary curriculum in Uganda and it caused problems, and teacher education faces many challenges that affect the preparation of teachers. In line, BOU adopted the national curriculum so that it becomes at par to the BEd from TTCs. Table I illustrates the
learners’ perceptions on the curriculum of the blended BEd programme where they already attending for their degree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE I. PERCEPTIONS ON BLENDED BEd CURRICULUM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students have the positive agreement towards (mean value 4.19 and SD 0.86) and it means that BEd curriculum is arranged according to the difficulty level of contents. Students also have the strong agreement on the teaching (mean 4.42 and SD 0.69) and on evaluation process (mean 4.36 and SD 0.77) in the blended curriculum. Load is given in the curriculum is at an optimum level (mean 3.91 and SD 1.10) and students have the moderate agreement on the pressure to complete the curriculum. Module or self-learning materials (SLMs) are of based on the curriculum (mean 4.18 and SD 0.89) and the learners had the strong agreement on the quality of the SLMs (mean 4.17 and SD 0.83). The results reveal that the BEd curriculum and its subsequent products – the SLMs – are of good quality and learner friendly.

Admission and Learners’ Performance

Table II illustrates the admission, progress and achievements of the students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE II. ADMISSION, PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The School of Education has the clear policy which determines the entry quality of the admired students (mean 4.56 and SD 0.73), and in this way, the school gets the quality students as input who process the commitments to fulfill the desired attainment (mean 4.53 and SD 0.69) because students had the strong agreements on the fairness of the admission process (mean 4.32 and 0.76). The School
maintains the students’ progress (mean 4.27 and SD 0.82), and students get the feedback on their existing performance as it is monitored (mean 4.02 and SD 0.87) as the students’ records are maintained properly (mean 4.30 and SD 0.86). The results suffice the quality indicators of the blended BEd programme.

**Performance: Teaching-Learning**

Table III illustrates the teaching-learning of the BEd programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>Teaching-learning of BEd is interactive</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>Lesson plans/course outlines are provided to the students in advance</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>Class size is optimum for interactive teaching learning</td>
<td>252</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4</td>
<td>Entity provides adequate opportunities for practical exercises to apply in real life situation</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5</td>
<td>Required lab/practical work is done</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E6</td>
<td>Tutors are sincere in their responsibility</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students had the moderate agreement on the interactive learning process in the BEd programme (mean 3.73 and SD 1.25), and even, they had moderate agreement on interaction in tutorial sessions (mean 3.37 and SD 1.17). Same was seen in the incorporating the pedagogic learning with the environmental stimulus i.e. the BEd learners do have less opportunities for practical exercises to apply in real life situation (mean 3.65 and SD 1.19). On the other hand, students have the strong agreement with the BEd’s teaching practice (mean 4.45 and SD 0.70) and tutors were found responsible in performing their duties (mean 4.51 and SD 0.70).

**Learners’ Support Services**

Nsamba and Makoe [8] recommended that service quality in distance education can be measured by six dimensions namely; tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, delivery, assurance and student participation. Each dimension can be measured by a number of attributes. The dimensions will be useful in helping distance education institutions evaluate the quality of their support services from students' perspective; by so doing monitoring the overall performance of their services.

The respondents who were BEd students were asked: Is there any arrangement to provide academic guidance and counseling to the students at entity. 67.5% of the respondents reported they have counseling and guidance services, 4.3% of them reported no facility and 28.2% of the BEd students reported that they don’t know about this.
In respond to the question on “Do you get study materials (course modules) in time?” Students also get the hard copy of the books and 77.8% of the students passed their opinions that they get the book intime. It also noticed that programme administration seems good.

BEd students are well aware of the different communicational portals of social media such as Skype, face book, twitter, whatsapp, messenger and mobile phones etc. There was least use of mobile technology (3%). Only 45% of the students preferred e-Book used for their learning engagement while 49% of the students’ preferred BOUtube used by them for their learning engagement. E-platform was the choices of 3% of the students for their learning engagement. The results of the study also suggested that the BOUtube was the most preferred media for their learning engagement as it has privilege of downloading free which can facilitate students in having immediate assistance and guidance from teachers.
Assessment

Students were asked to specify their pattern of evaluation. In response to the question “Which of the following techniques were used for assessment purpose? (Answer may be more than one)”. There were options - a. quiz, b. assignment, c. term paper, d. continuous evaluation, e. final exam, f. Teaching practice, g. oral exam, h. computer lab exam, and others (please specify). Most of the students selected the option of assignment, final exam, teaching practice, and oral exam (viva voce). Moreover, they can get quick response and feedback for their performance along with being an effective mode of assessment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

BOU-TQI project is extremely important when it comes to changing classroom practice. TQI works at different levels; at national level through putting in place and building the capacity of important institutions like NTRCA and the Apex body. These institutions have a long term impact on the quality of teaching through quality assurance, accreditation, certification, standardization of teachers, and teacher development institutions. The National BEd curriculum concentrated heavily on practice teaching with compare to BOU existing curriculum that is to focus more on the qualitative efforts. To achieve this, National BEd under ODL setting has to have proper monitoring and evaluation. Followings are recommended for the National BEd program:

- Regular school level assessment and monitoring should be conducted to ensure the impact of training on improving classroom performance;
- Enhanced information dissemination and coordination with TQI have to be strengthened with another phase.
REFERENCES

1. BOU Internal Documents, Handbooks, Brochures, Newsletter, Pro-Forma Letters, Proposals, etc. as provided by the Dean, School of Education. Retrieved from https://www.bou.edu.bd/.
16. Power Point Presentations Different Meetings and Workshops of TQI-BOU Partnership Building by Selina Akter, National Consultants of the TQI.
20. TQI-SEP Internal Documents, Handbooks, Brochures, Newsletter Pro-Forma Letters, Proposals, etc. As Supplied by Selina Akter, National Consultants of the TQI.