

Role of Radio & TV Programmes in Distance and Open Learning System: A Case of Bangladesh Open University

By

Salma Karim*
Mostafa Azad Kamal**
Md. Mayenul Islam***

ABSTRACT

In distance and open learning system different types of media are used to transmit education to the learners. Along with the print materials, different types of audio-visual supports are provided to meet the learners' need. Audio-visual programmes may be treated as a substitute for the personal touch of the teacher. Through audio-visual media especially television – the distant learners can listen to the talks of the course experts and also see them on the TV screen. Radio and TV programmes help the learners get the direction about how the courses should be dealt with and also explanations of the difficult concepts in the courses. This paper aims to reveal the role/effectiveness of radio and TV programmes in distance and open learning system on the basis of a survey on the students of Graduate Diploma in Management (GDM) programme of Bangladesh Open University (BOU).

Introduction

Among all the available electronic media, the radio and the television appear to be the most common and popular ones for the distance students to learn from and for the distance educators to impart

* Salma Karim, Assistant Professor, School of Business, Bangladesh Open University.

** Mostafa Azad Kamal, Assistant Professor, School of Business, Bangladesh Open University.

*** Md. Mayenul Islam, Lecturer, School of Business, Bangladesh Open University.

education from a distance¹. In spite of advanced communication technologies with more glamour and efficiency, the radio is capable of generating the students, own complete and thoroughly satisfying imaginative images (Jones, 1962). Merdian (1979) finds that the radio is able to simulate and make use of the student's imagination to a great extent. With the advancement in communication technology, a variety of audio-visual media – radio television broadcast, video cassettes, video compact disc, video text and computer – have become part of the study package in distance and open learning system.

Kachroo (1999) also reported that Institute of Correspondence Education, University of Jammu as well as IGNOU supported students' learning through counseling and mass media namely radio, TV and newspapers. Ding (1994) finds that distance education at tertiary level in China has two major forms: one is the correspondence education provided by conventional universities and colleges, and several independent correspondence school. China began its correspondence education at university level in 1953. In 1990 the total enrolment of correspondence students reached 536,200. From 1982 to 1991 there were 1.453 million graduates passing out from Chinese Radio and TV Universities (RTVU), which equals 31% of the total graduates from conventional universities and colleges over the same period, and 58% of the graduates from other adult institutes of higher education in that country. This means that about 17 out of 100 total university graduates in China during 1982-1991 were from RTVUs.

In open and distance education system, print materials, tutorial sessions, radio, television, audio and video-cassettes, CD and other innovative techniques are used for effective transmission of knowledge to the learners at a distance. Since for on-campus teaching, a huge infrastructural development is essential, the developing countries, like Bangladesh, with very limited resources have no alternative without implementing off-campus education system to educate their vast population. But, in order to ensure the quality of education, the distance education institutions must be careful about the use of proper media. Effective combination of print and electronic media is necessary for assuring effectiveness of the distance education system.

¹ Media in Distance Education: Broadcast and Cassette Technology. Volume-2, STRIDE, Indragandhi National Open University.

Besides tutorial sessions the study package for distant learners provided by BOU include printed texts, radio and television programmes and audio-cassettes. It has not yet adopted computer-mediated technologies (e.g. Internet) and satellite TV channels for teaching because of resource constraint and poor access. Thus, in addition to the print materials, radio and television are the only electronic media BOU is using to transmit education to its students. Therefore, it is essential to ensure the high effectiveness of the radio and TV programmes. In this paper, we tried to assess the effectiveness of BOU's radio and TV programmes for the learners.

Bangladesh Open University

The Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is the only distance and open learning public university of this country. BOU has opened up a new vista in distance education in the country. BOU was established by the Bangladesh Parliament in 1992 by the Act No. 38. Its objectives are to:

Expand all levels of education, knowledge and science by a diversity of means, including the use of any communication technology to improve the quality of education and to provide opportunities for education to the general public through mass-orientation of education and to create efficient manpower by improving the quality of education in general.

This is indicative of three-fold objectives as:

- 1) The improvement of quality of education
- 2) The provision of educational opportunities to a wide range of citizens and
- 3) Improving the competence level of the workforce

Prime objective of BOU is to transform the country's vast human resources into an educated and trained workforce by extending to them a wide range of academic programmes both formal and non-formal. BOU's programmes are aimed at every one, particularly working people and women and those socially disadvantaged groups, who cannot enroll in traditional universities.

BOU has six schools in the field of science and technology, education, social science, agriculture and business. BOU has already

launched 18 formal and 19 non-formal programmes. Formal programmes include master degrees, bachelor degrees, diploma and certificate programmes, for the distance and open learners. Over 1,50,000 (approximately) students have already been enrolled in various programmes. Non-formal programmes are designed to make people aware as to how to live a better life. These are community based programmes and are intended for the people who are willing to improve the level of their knowledge and understanding about the environment and socio-cultural aspect of life in general. These include basic science, agriculture, pisciculture, poultry, livestock, health nutrition, ethics and environment. The university is also planning to start its M.Phil and Ph.D. level programmes in the near future. The university has a media division to produce audio-video educational programmes and transform them into cassettes for broadcasting by radio and television.

Role of Radio and Television in Distance Education at BOU

Siddiqui, A.S. (1987) stated that selection of appropriate media for a learning package is a complex decision influenced by a variety of considerations, such as the specific learning objectives of the unit, the nature of subject matter, learner's background and experiences and the characteristics of the target group, as well as practical constraints including availability of infrastructure and financial resources.

Singh (1999) reported that broadcast television is the most popular because it is the most easily accessible and the most effective telecom technique. The advantages of TV are:

1. It is good for reaching mass audience
2. It can be recorded and watched at any suitable time and
3. It is permanent resource

Rumble (1994) said that four media namely print, audio, television, computers are available for teaching purposes, in one technological form or another. The distinction between media and technology is a useful one. A medium is a generic form of communication associated with particular ways of presenting knowledge. There are five important media in education: direct human contact (face-to-face), text (including still graphics), audio, television and computing. The use of each media gives both variety and the chance of accommodating different learning styles.

BOU is using print, television, radio, audio-cassettes and face-to-face tutorial service, for each student. It has not adopted computing media and technologies for teaching, for obvious reasons for cost and poor access, but it has adopted a spectrum of four of the five media, and makes use of four technologies (Table 1).

Table-1: BOU media and technologies

Media	Technologies	One way technology application	Two way technology application
Direct human contact/tutorial service	N/a		Lectures/seminars
Text	Print	Course Text	
Audio	Radio Audio Cassettes	Radio Programmes Cassette Programmes	
Television	Broadcasting	Broadcasting programmes	

Source: The Guardian, Bangladesh Open University, 1994

The table indicates that the technology-based media is very important for distance learners. The following sections such as radio and TV briefly discuss the possible functions that the technologies and media employed by BOU can play.

Radio

Jamison and McAnany (1978) reviewed research literature and concluded that the radio, properly used, can teach as well as/or, in some cases, better than the traditional instruction. Considering the effectiveness, the costs and the access to technology, they further stated that the radio is a more suitable medium for the third world countries.

Distance learning combining the radio with other media, particularly with the print materials and occasional personal contact session, attempts to replace both the teacher and the institution. The developed countries like UK, Australia, Canada and Japan make extensive use of the radio for teaching at a distance. China, Thailand and Kenya have many years of experience with the radio correspondence approach to learning. Radio Santa Maria is a successful example of home study with the help of radio

by individuals who failed to attend school-based education (McAnany and Mayo, 1980). BOU is also making use of the radio for distance education in Bangladesh.

Radio can be used to relay lectures, provide discussions of other elements of the course materials, give students access to alternative views, provide material for analysis (e.g. children's speech patterns), give access to performance, provide rural experiences, and collect and relay to others the views and experiences of specialists, experts, and witnesses. Because it is so cheap, it can provide a channel for messages to be sent to students, and a way of giving instant feedback place, though it can be used in conjunction with the telephone or letters. Its other major drawback is its ephemeral nature.

BOU is engaged in planning, producing and evaluating both radio broad casts and audio-cassettes for its students. From the very beginning, audio tapes and radio broadcasts have formed part of the BOU course materials.

Television

One of the main objectives of establishing BOU is to provide the various sections of the population with a wider access to higher education. To achieve this objective, BOU has adopted a teaching-learning system based on a combination of print and non-print media. As one of the non-print media BOU aims to advance and disseminate knowledge by television broadcast.

Television is a complex medium. As a medium television can personalize the teaching, enabling the distant student to identify the individually of the teacher(s) responsible for the materials, and provide a public image of the university's presence in the community. As such it also plays an important part in recruiting students. Although that regularly scheduled broadcast would motivate student to keep up with the pace of their studies, this is almost certainly not the case. This pacing function is far more likely to be achieved through regular assessment. While television can be a powerful educational tool, its value is totally dependent on the quality of materials and the skill with which it is used. Moreover, television is essentially a one-way communication medium and as such it does not provide for immediate feedback on learners' reactions, queries

and doubts. Some times the absence of active participation and lack of provision for feedback is likely to fail to sustain the interest and enthusiasm of learners. However, the real strength of television is its unique teaching features and its ability to improve learning efficiency.

Rumble (1994) reported that at the time BOU was planned, the percentage of population having ownership of television was still very low in Bangladesh (0.5 per 100 people in 1990 against 5.5 per 100 people in all developing countries, and 54.4 per 100 in industrialized countries). Not surprisingly, there were concerns about the use of broadcasting technologies where ownership of receivers is so low. Bangladesh Television (BTV), the government owned network, broadcasts on a single channel which currently covers about 85% of the total population area via its originating station in Dhaka, and nine relay stations. Some areas of the country are currently not covered, notably the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

BOU transmits 40 minutes of TV programmes six days a week in between 4.00pm and 6.00pm and 30 minutes of radio broadcasts daily between 7.00pm and 8.00pm. All the schools of the university share these time schedule. Hence, on an average each school has one day per week for its programme. To compensate for low quality tutorial support in areas outside the big cities (where the quality of local tutorial support is difficult to maintain) as well as to ensure a consistent standard of support across the country, each school of the university carefully selects the contents of the radio and TV programme.

The Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To assess effectiveness of BOU's radio and TV programme
2. To suggest the remedial measures to be undertaken to make the radio and TV programmes more effective for BOU students.

Methodology and Sources of Data

The survey was conducted on a sample of the students of GDM programme of Dhaka, Chittgong, Sylhet, Comila, Mymensingh, Barisal, Faridpur, Jessor, Khulna, Rajshai, Bogra and Rangpur regional resource centres of BOU. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data.

The questionnaire were distributed among 340 students in ten regional resource centres of BOU, but only 200 questionnaires were received back, being filled up by the sample students. Tabular analysis has been done in the study.

Results and Analysis

Student' profile

According to the questionnaire database information, the distribution of the sample students by different characters is shown in Table-2 below:

Table-2 Distribution of BOU Students by Sex, Age and Occupation

Sex

Sex	Percentage
Male	76.25
Female	23.75

Age

Age	Percentage
20-25	15.00
25-30	31.25
30-35	37.00
35-40	16.25
40+	00.50

Occupation

Occupation	Percentage
Government Service	20.50
Non-government service	48.25
Defense service	06.25
Businessmen	03.75
Regular students and others	21.25

Figures in the table above show the proportion of male and female students of GDM programme to be 76.25 percent and 23.75 percent respectively, but their age distribution differs significantly. The majority of GDM students are below 35 years of age. The younger age of GDM students suggests that these students are, mostly the students or persons at the early stage of their career, interested to improve their skills in business or management. The nature of this programme and its rate of enrolment suggest that this programme has been successful in proving the growing interest in BOU programme. While the majority of GDM students are non-government service holders representing 48.35 percent, 20.50 percent are government service holders, 6.25 percent are from defense and 21.25 percent are regular students* or from other occupation.

The majority of the students are interested in the GDM programme because this programme is professional and thus the programme has generated interest among the private and public sector employees.

The opinion of the most of the students of GDM programme is that the students have selected distance and open education because of the flexibility of the programme that allows them to go on with their studies and job simultaneously.

* The students who are not in service.

Access to radio broadcast

Bangladesh Betar's medium wave transmission reaches most of the areas of the country. In fact the radio coverage in Bangladesh is almost around 100 percent. The general economic status of GDM students of the Business School also ensures almost all the students to have access to radio. However it is evident from the research findings that 86.25 percent of GDM students have access to radio and 50 percent of them found it effective and helpful in their pursuit of studies. Around 45 percent of them could not listen to BOU's radio programme regularly. 81 percent reported that the radio programme is easy to understand. Students' preference for radio transmission, by day of week and time is shown in table-3.

Table-3 Students Preference for the day and time of radio programme broadcasts

a) Day

<i>Day of week</i>	Percentage
Saturday	10.00
Sunday	02.00
Monday	04.00
Tuesday	03.00
Wednesday	05.00
Thursday	05.00
Friday	71.00

b) Time

<i>Time</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
08.00-10.00 AM	05%
10.00-12.00 AM	02%
12.00-14.00 PM	01%
14.00-16.00 PM	03%
16.00-18.00 PM	08%
18.00-20.00 PM	65%
20.00-22.00 PM	16%

School of Business broadcasts radio programme for GDM students on Sunday in between 18.00-20.00 PM. However, 71 percent students prefer radio programme to be broadcasted on Friday and 65 percent opined that broadcast time should be in between 6.00 to 8.00 PM.

Access to TV broadcast

Bangladesh Television, the government owned network, broadcasts on a single channel which currently covers about 85 percent of total population area via its originating station in Dhaka and nine relay stations throughout the country. As per our findings 71.25 percent of the GDM students has access to TV. Eighty five percent of the students appreciate TV broadcasting by BOU, they believe that the programmes are suitable for GDM students and for others in terms of content. GDM students' preference for TV transmission by day of week and time is shown in Tavle-4.

Table-4: Students' preference for the day and time of TV broadcasts

a) Day

<i>Day of week</i>	Percentage
Saturday	11.00
Sunday	01.00
Monday	01.00
Tuesday	02.00
Wednesday	03.00
Thursday	15.00
Friday	67.00

b) Time

<i>Time</i>	Percentage
15-17 PM	06%
17-19 PM	13%
19-21 PM	15%
21-23 PM	66%

School of Business broadcasts TV programme for GDM students on Tuesday in between 15.30 to 17.00 PM. However, 67 percent students prefer Friday as the day of broadcasting and 66 percent students prefer 19.00 to 21.00 PM as the suitable time of broadcasting.

Summary

The findings of the study about the radio and television programmes of BOU can be summarized as below:

1. Radio sets are available to more than 86 percent of the total participants while only 50 percent find it effective and helpful in their study. Nearly 45 percent can not listen to the programmes regularly because of the unsuitable time schedule. Also 14 percent do not have access to radio sets. 81 percent find radio programmes easy to understand while 19 percent find it difficult.
2. The respondents identified some significant problems in the use of radio programmes, the most frequent being:
 - (a) Unsuitable time schedule
 - (b) Non-availability of time due to their business and/or family involvement
3. TV sets were available to more than 71 percent of the students, of the rest 29 percent students had not their own TV sets, 14 percent watched their friends' TV.
4. The TV programme, presented by BOU were appreciated by 85 percent of GDM students. They said the programmes are suitable for their text materials. And 19 percent of the respondent reported that TV programmes of the GDM programme were helpful to gather general knowledge.
5. The responding viewers identified some problems in television programmes which were, by and large, unsuitable time for reviewing the programmes in television programmes which were, by an large, unsuitable time for viewing the programmes and high load shading of electricity.
6. Mostly 79 percent of the viewers expressed their opinion that the TV programmes should be presented on Fridays and between 7.00pm and 9.00pm.

Recommendations

Since the distant learners cannot have much face to face contact with teachers like the on-campus students, sitting with only print materials may be boring to them. Standard instructive radio and TV programmes may relieve them from that boringness. To make the radio and TV programmes more effective the concerned authority of BOU should be careful about the following things:

- The time span for radio programme broadcasting should be extended. The same topic should be broadcast on two consecutive days. It would be very helpful for the students if the programmes are broadcast after 10pm so that the students can listen to the programmes. The broadcasting should be regular and followed by announcing the topic of the next day broadcasting.
- The quality of presentation should be ensured. Presentation must be attractive. To avoid the monotony more visuals/outdoor shots should be incorporated in the programmes. Discussion should be on the critical and hard topics of the course that will help the students better. If the students discussions could be arranged in the form of classroom interaction, they would benefit the students more. Continuous talk of a single presenter may make the whole programme boring to the students.
- The teachers of the concerned school should come forward to design and direct the radio and TV programmes.
- Repetition of a single programme several times in the same semester should be stopped.
- The TV broadcast time should be enhanced. For that BOU can think of getting satellite access and a separate channel should be opened to broadcast its programmes. This will reduce its dependency on the government owned channel too.

- The radio and TV programmes may be supplemented by providing the students with audio and video-cassettes.

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