

Education from a distance

Bangladesh has the facilities to start an Open University. Such an institution will leave an indelible mark on the academic atmosphere in the country.

The distance education system is applied in all the open universities. The essential components are printed course materials, Radio & T.V. broadcast audio-video, assettes, tutorial services, summer school through regional centres and central counselling-guidance services.

(a) The students are not dislocated from their residence or profession.
(b) There is no fixed teacher student ratio. The greater number of students is, the more economic the system becomes.

(c) Neither separate classrooms nor residential accommodation is needed.
(d) Through media, the master teaching of a set of expert teachers can reach thousands of students, rich or poor, privileged or underprivileged, scattered all over the country.

(e) The university can simultaneously serve a varied clientele groups such as school dropouts, people engaged in various services and professions etc. Despite the variation in age and sex all students can enjoy academic privileges equally.

(f) The university may not require services of full time academicians. It may work through the optimal utilization of the facilities of existing conventional educational institutions and other universities.

In Bangladesh natural resources are limited. The enormous number of able bodied untrained population are a liability. To convert the huge inactive population into skilled manpower, a proper education system must have to be developed. Here not only the literacy rate is very low but also the available educational facilities are quite inadequate to cater to the country's needs. Every year thousands of students are refused university admission. The situation in the field of technical and vocational education is more alarming.

To solve the problem there are three alternatives:

(a) To increase the intake capacity of the existing universities and higher educational institutions.

(b) To increase the number of traditional universities and institutes.

(c) To establish distance education based Open University concept.

Of the three alternatives, because of financial reasons, (a) & (b) do not appear to be feasible propositions.

In an identical situation, the neighbouring countries such as Thailand, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka etc. have been tackling the problem through establishment of Open University. In Thailand Open University, the number of enrolled students exceeds 4 lakhs, in Pakistan 150 thousands, in China more than 10 lakhs. In India in addition to the existing provincial Open Universities a National Open University has recently been started in New Delhi.

As a result, the university can introduce any number of short or long, degree or non-degree or on the job courses for all classes of people and can withdraw the same when the need is over.

(g) The government is to meet about 95 per cent of the expenditure in a conventional university; whereas in an Open University once it is started 20 per cent state allocation is sufficient to run the same.

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In Bangladesh almost the entire population of the country speak in one language. The people are of the same cultural background and the entire country is under radio and television broadcasting networks through ground relay stations. No satellite is needed for broadcasting. The syllabus and text books in Primary, Secondary and Higher Secondary level are the same. Moreover, Bangladesh Institute of Distance Education (BIDE), under the Ministry of Education, has already

started a modest experimental programme on B.Ed. through distance education under the academic umbrella of Rajshahi University. This has created a fertile soil for starting an Open University in Bangladesh taking BIDE as the nucleus.

(i) To provide facilities for training teachers to raise their professional skill.
(ii) To provide and promote, general and professional type of education to enable the people to raise their educational standards in response to the needs of society.

(iii) To promote research so as to generate new knowledge and to apply it to national development.
(iv) To render public service to society by disseminating knowledge so as to promote personal development and professional competence.
(v) To preserve and develop national culture. Other forms of diffusion of knowledge and provision of educational services to the

community undertaken by the Open University may include:

(a) Diffusion of knowledge in a given area by organising regular training courses either short or long through the distance learning system.

(b) Diffusion of general knowledge through various teaching media.

(c) Diffusion of technical and professional knowledge and advice to the community through the services of resource personnel and

(d) To upgrade the knowledge and ability of working population of the country.

(vi) To provide a second chance of education for school dropouts & life long education for interested clientele. The university academic programmes may cover four major areas:

(i) Functional Vocational Education.
(ii) General Education.
(iii) Teacher Education.
(iv) Research & Development.

The academic courses of the above programmes may be under the following category:

gories:
(i) Foundation courses
(ii) Certificate courses
(iii) Diploma courses
(iv) Bachelors degree courses.

(v) Post graduate courses.
The university may offer special courses for various government and non-government organisations too.

Introducing this innovative system in education in the national level may invite a lot of criticism from the servative sectors. They may blame the present unreliable postal system, non availability of efficient writers and tutors, ineffective radio and T.V. broadcasts etc. In reply to this, it may be mentioned that BIDE has already overcome most of the difficulties through innovative measures which may easily be adopted in the proposed Open University.

BIDE has already paved the path for an Open University through the emergence of 1675 post graduate students in the B.Ed. examination through distance education.

NOTE

The writer is Director of the Bangladesh Institute for Distance Education.