SWOT Analysis for Vocational Education and Training (VET) Program through Open Schooling in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Bangladesh already fulfilled the eligibility criteria set by the United Nations to be recognized as a developing country and graduated to least developed countries (LDCs). In order to do this, Bangladesh achieved tremendous success in the education sectors, say, improvement in gross secondary enrollment ratio; but not much gain in vocational education and skills development although the country enjoyed huge progress in the development economic and industrial development. But country needs huge resources for the program on VET to gain productivity in the development process. Bangladesh Government has accepted the policy of vocationalization of education in the country. There are resources constraints; in this situation VET through open school is the innovative and cost-effective approach. Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) – regional affiliates of The Commonwealth of Learning – implements the project on VET through open schooling with the Open School of Bangladesh Open University (BOU-OS). CEMCA conducts some research works to know the feasibility of the said project and the current study contexts the BOU Open School only. The VET at OS has root in the past in a limited level and through this project VET is going to be mainstreamed. As the present study is an attempt of analyses the strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) of vocational courses at secondary stage, the investigators adopts normative survey method for the present study. Qualitative analysis was deployed for analysis of data obtained through documents, observation schedule and interview schedule at the Open School.

Keywords: *VET, open schooling, OER, LDCs*

Introduction

This paper presents external and internal aspects of the Open School of Bangladesh Open University (BOU-OS) to run vocational education and training (VET) through open and distance learning (ODL). This research is part of the formulation of the strategic plan to implement the VET program under the technology and financial support from the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA). Finally, it presents a situation analysis using a framework of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the School which addresses the issues in vocational education and training (VET) through open schooling in Bangladesh. The main aim of the Open School is to impart formal school education for dropouts who are unable to continue their studies for various socio-economic reasons. To address these emerging societal demands, instructional contents were primarily delivered in print-based formats (where instructional design is essential), supplemented with lesson components typically delivered in convenient audio and/ or video formats. Now, in addition to broadcast, it is integrating technology in the delivery of programmes. The VET programme also aims to integrate technology for bringing cost-effectiveness and widening access to skills development.

Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to present the overview of the vocational education and training (VET) at the Open School of Bangladesh Open University. It also presents the following specific objectives:

i) To evaluate the extent to which the existing situation of the OS aligns with what was planned for, considering many indicators. This will be achieved through SOWT analysis of current conditions.

ii) To recommend for a general guideline that can be base for the School transformation plan which will have the capability to resolve the weaknesses and threats facing VET.

Need for VET

At present, Open School has been core faculty of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) which runs programs through open schooling using self-learning materials (SLMs), radio-TV broadcasts (RTBs) and face-to-face (f2f) contacts at the learners' corners. Open School has the experience of two kinds of programs – pre-University and tertiary programs which have no vocational components.

Open School runs two school programmes – Secondary School Certificate (SSC) for Grades: 9 & 10 and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) programmes for Grades: 10 & 11. I operate its programme throughout the country using the administrative setup of the University–Regional Centers (RCs) and Sub-Regional Centers (SRCs) (see Figure 1). There are country-wide12 RCs and 80 SRCs under the management of the Student Support Services SSS Department of the University). Open School affiliates the formal schools as Study Centers (SCs) of the SSC programme and formal colleges for the SCs of the HSC programme. Teachers from the formals schools and colleges are recruited as tutors of the Open School on contract basis and at BOU tutors are termed as contractors and also recognized as the field level practitioners of the ODL. There is a demand from the field to implement vocational education and training (VET) for dropout students who are already enrolled in the SSC and HSC programme (Rahman & Panda, 2012). Open Schools' academic portfolio has been the same for the last 20 years and no programmes had not been added except a pilot programme called JCS (Junior School Certificate) in 20017 in association with CAMPE - NGO coalition – for the students of the Open Basic Education (OBE) students graduated from the NGO schools (Masud & Rahman, 2013). The JSC curriculum was customized and coupled with vocational education. The programme was stopped when the project finished. In Bangladesh, enrollment in formal education has increased at the school level which indicates that formal schooling has been doing good and dropout rates declined. As a result, in the past couple of years, OS enrolment declined (Figure 2).
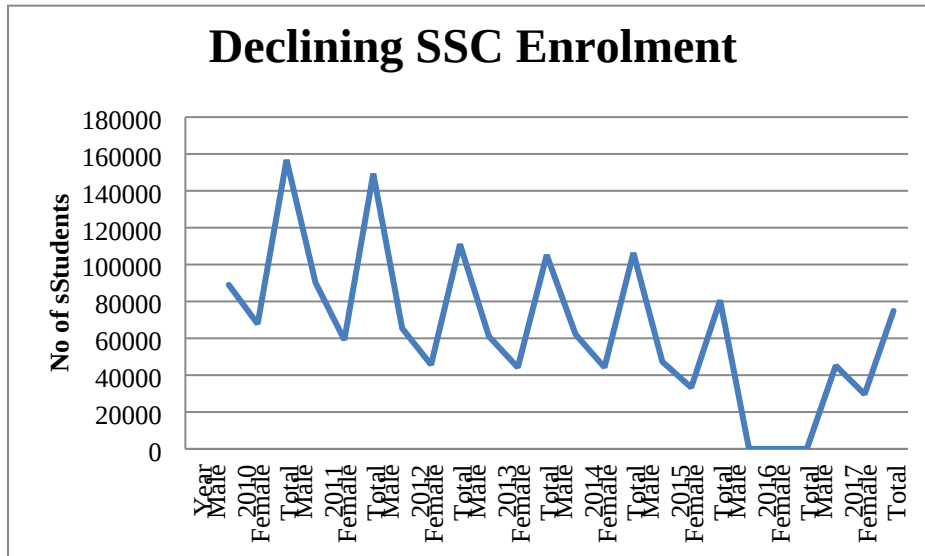
Figure 2: SSC Enrolment

But opposite happened in the HSC enrolment – the number increases over time (Figure 3). Over the last couple of years, the School used the Open Accessed Materials (OAM) and subsequently, the University developed the OER Policy 2014 and then, in 2017, it launched the OER repository for the learning materials – print, audio and videos, with the help of Commonwealth Educational Media for Asia (CEMCA) which has been found very cost-effective (Rahman & Panigrahi, 2018). The School plans to integrate the VET into the existing portfolio of the school curriculum.
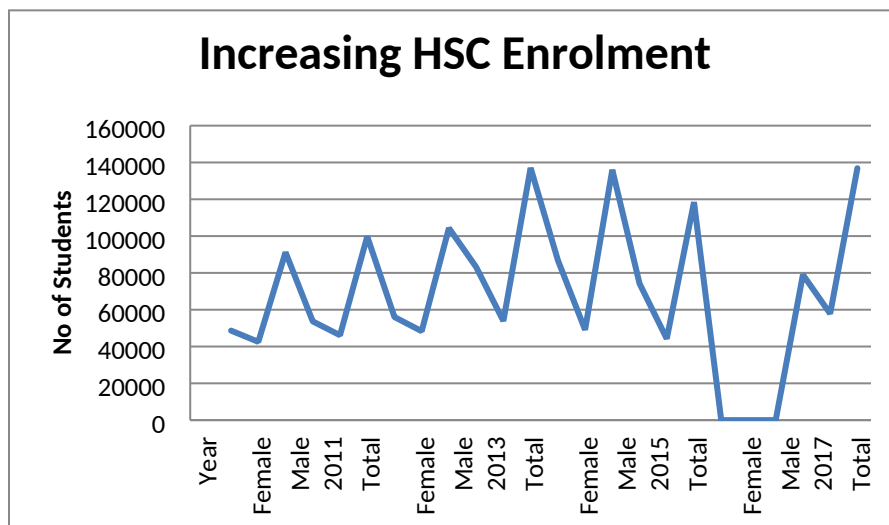

Figure 3: HSC Enrolment

SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis for VET at OS was performed to assess its external and internal weaknesses and strengths, opportunities, and threats. This analysis helps in developing strategic plans to enhance the quality of the existing and new programmes. When correctly applied, it is possible for School to get an overall picture of its present situation in relation to its environment. The SWOT analysis covered all of the following areas the School intervenes and each of these areas can be a source of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats.

Findings and Discussion

Bangladesh has enjoyed impressive economic growth rates over the past decade and already graduated as a 'developing country' from the "least developed country', but challenges of how to make growth sustainable and more inclusive. Education, no doubt, assists growth, and when the country turns industrially, the education sector needs to put emphasis on vocational education and training (VET) to feed the increasing demand in the job market. The participants reflected as under:

"In Bangladesh, we have resource constraints and we need to focus on vocational education and training (VET) through open schooling using the appropriate ICT leveraging the OER as it has development potential. We need to redesign the existing model of open schooling and focus on expanding the academic portfolio in consistent with the government's short-run and long-run policies. Therefore, the VET project has been befitting with these policies."

Strengths

- Accessibility to the local community through RC, SRC and SC in every corner of the country;
- Management activities are governed by the statute and other rules of business which are set and revised a number of times to update;
- Main stakeholders are the governments, BOU, teachers, tutors, students and communities;

- BOU already celebrated Golden Jubilee and gained huge experience in the delivery of ODL programmes using appropriate technologies.
- Applicability of ODL using different media
- Open School implements various project works along with its normal activities with international agencies such as COL, British Council, CEMCA, SPIDER, etc.
- BOU-OS has a number of qualified and experienced faculties to operate the VET program.
- Well-equipped Media-center with skilled professionals
- 12 RCs and 80 SRCs can, directly and indirectly, facilitate the VET program all over the country
- Strong Digital Support – government and private sector
- Faculties are exposed in media activities
- Countrywide Network with government and private schools
- Unity among faculties – supportive in all ventures
- Sufficient ICT support by the University to cater to any section or niche of the population.
- Faculties are experienced in learning material development.
- Well-equipped eLearning center is available at the University managed by trained personnel.

Opportunities

- VET's market is in very high demand
- Scope for integration of ICT to increase access to VET.
- Easy to the engagement of learners with the delivery of the appropriate VET curriculum.
- Scope of ODL for increasing the academic portfolio.
- Increased base for accessibility in rural/sub-urban areas.
- Direct employment opportunities for the learners.
- Uplifts the standard of living and directly contributes to the economy.
- Contributes to women's employment/empowerment.
- Enhance the foreign remittance, if they are employed overseas like another non-resident Bangladeshi.
- Adequate Vocational Institutions for running the planned vocational program
- Policy support from the Government.

⊕ Scope of employability at home and abroad

Weaknesses

⊕ Lack of sufficient trained HR in BOU and in the vocational sector.

⊕ Lack of ICT support for vocational education

⊕ No in-house (at the OS) infrastructural support for vocations

⊕ Religious and cultural barriers for voc, say, gender-sensitive voc such as nursing, beauty culture, etc.

⊕ Faculties have unwillingness and reluctance about the VET program.

⊕ No VET center at the BOU.

⊕ Insufficient manpower at the School

⊕ Lack of effective policy

⊕ Lack of technical support (Lab/training center)

⊕ Not specialized in VET

⊕ Insufficient number of VET course materials.

Threats

⊕ There is the likelihood of change in policy toward policy

⊕ Lack of infrastructural support

⊕ Lack of awareness about VET.

⊕ Competitive to the traditional program.

⊕ Equivalence with the national framework.

⊕ Acceptability in the job market or society for VET through ODL

⊕ Learners may be treated as lower-class professionals in the job sector.

⊕ Dependency on financial support to run the project.

⊕ Lake of awareness of women's participation.

⊕ To cover remote areas as per need.

⊕ Ensuring quality of VET education

⊕ Possibility of dropout.

Despite the abovementioned weakness and threats, VET is crucial for social and economic security in Bangladesh and its citizens.

Recommendations

- Open Schools planned VET should be at par with the National VET Framework and compatible to pursue higher studies in any stream;
- It should have the compliance of national agenda, access, equity, economic inclusion, relevance, and quality as measured by the variety of systems and competencies.
- Design the VET as a L3 i.e. lifelong learning;
- Transform the open schooling to produce skills relevant to the labour market emerging from the knowledge economy which emerged, in turn, from the digital-Bangladesh agenda and the country's Vision 2021. Therefore, the design of the VET should be responsive to the market needs, and the OS should respond accordingly. This can be achieved through:

  i) Needs Assessment Survey should be conducted to select the market-driven trades or skills;

  ii) Develop the policy components for the SC by drawing the international and national context;

  iii) Run couples of piloting on VET through open schooling;

  iv) Create linkages with the chamber of commerce and develop MoU with the conventional VET providers – private, NGO and governments;

  v) Identify the key policy directions with respect to OS transformation to meet the requirements of the V2021.

  vi) Demand-driven stills need to be identified and maximize the relevant competencies through redesigning the curriculum and the OS should work with the NSDC.

  vii) Ensure the stakeholders' involvement in designing and implementing the VET.

  viii) Value and adopt appropriate technologies for developing and implementing the VET courses of study.

- Evaluate OER-based VET to bring it cost-effective;

- Remedial courses such as English as soft skills should be incorporated in the courses of studies.

- VET should be intended learning outcome (ILO) based rather than output-based and the process should concentrate on learner-centric and learning portfolio should be designed in such a way that the ILO should be achieved through tutorials, readings, laboratory and workshop activities and hands-on training.

- Use of various media such as print, electronic and social – Facebook for publishing the VET initiatives of the BOU Open School to encourage enrolment in the OS-run VET programme.

- Develop admission standards at par with the government set framework.

- To ensure compliance with the accreditation policy of the NSDC framework.

- To design the learning environment initiatives at the VET center by ensuring the required facilities including the ICT.

- Measures should be taken to the VET cost-effective so that the sustainability of the programme can be achieved through the innovative modus-operandi – it can be achieved through implementing the OER-based approach – which will be given as the proposed VET Framework of the Open School. The school shall adopt the framework after having a review of the existing VET rules and regulations of the nation and the VET providers.

- M & E should be implemented in such a way that ensures the continuous assessment and the stakeholders reflections should be noted and the performance standards at the lead of activities.

- VET tutors should be prepared in such a way that they can replace their own classical view of instruction with the modern view of facilitation of learning. In order to do that the CPD (continuous professional development) programme for the VET tutors should be in place using the international standard of curriculum, say, ITC, ILO, Italy and the School of Education of the BOU should be dedicated to providing training of the VET tutors through face to face and/or online using the specialized platform.

- Self-adopted technology, say, Facebook, to be promoted by the school to ensure the best use of learning objects prepared through the mobile handset and self-edited by the VET tutors.

- Conduct scientific research and document for dissemination of the results for learning of other providers. In this situation, the school can recruit at least two PhD students to conduct research throughout the project.

ICT-based VET Framework for BOU Open School:

OER is being used to achieve the learning objectives and to bring the cost of programme delivery at a minimum range. Bonito et al. (2017) find that there is a sufficient number of learning resources are in the form of OER for students to meet the learning objective/s which are mix of media used (print, video, audio, multimedia) and these reduce the cost of delivery. One of the most well-known benefits of OER is its cost potential because OER can reduce the cost of the delivery of distance education courses (Bliss, Hilton, Wiley, & Thanos, 2013; Millard, 2014; OpenStax College, 2014; Wiley, Hilton, Ellington, & Hall, 2012). OER is now being used in different educational institutes for distance education delivery.

Our analysis realistically recognized the weaknesses and threats that exist for the Open School's effort is the first step to countering them with a robust and creative set of strengths and opportunities to run the VET project. The identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats shall assist Open School in making strategic plans and decisions for launching VET through open schooling integrating the pedagogic training for the VET tutors. The present policy of towards vocational education in the country is to provide VET for demand-driven skills in a cost-effective manner to bring economies of scale in human resource development (NSDC, 2014)

In conclusion, propose an ICT-based VET Framework for BOU Open School:

Open School runs programme using traditional open and distance learning (ODL) mode. The government is implementing digital-Bangladesh agenda and the Education Policy 2010 also emphasizes BOU to be a digital university. In line with this, the Open School strategizes paperless open schooling with the modus-operandi (see figure 4) as under:

Texts: 10 lecture notes @ 12 pages totaling **120 pages** of text materials for each course – to be developed by the Course Lecturer. The size of the total book will be the same for all courses; No external teacher will be recruited. Only in-house faculty will develop the lecture note using the University template.

PPTs: 10 PPTs slides to be used as supplementary materials – to be developed by the Course Lecturer;

Video: 10 Video lectures with interactive discussion for broadcasting through BTV chunk and/or WebTV – to be developed by the Course Lecturer; 20 short video clips, say 5-10 minutes, recorded through webCamera for use in the smartphone – to be developed by the Course Lecturer;

Audio: Required audio programmes will be used as required through WebRadio and Bangladesh Betar;

Tutorials: Tutorial Support Services – by the local Tutors under the guidance of the Course Lecturer (discussed in the tutor database);
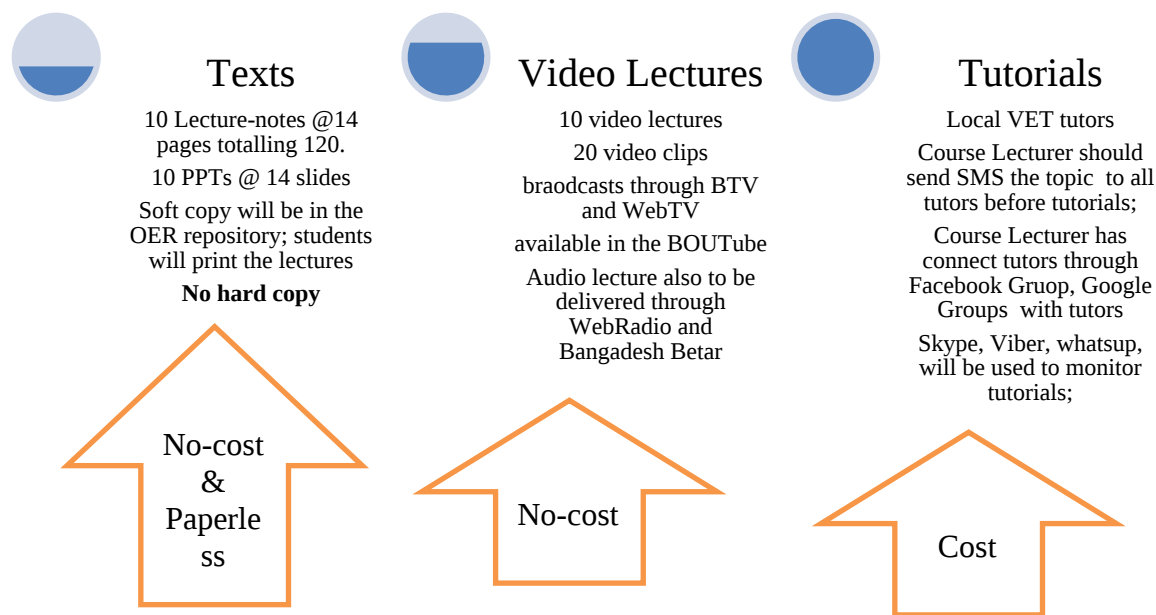
Texts

10 Lecture-notes @14 pages totalling 120.

10 PPTs @ 14 slides

Soft copy will be in the OER repository; students will print the lectures

No hard copy

Video Lectures

10 video lectures

20 video clips

braodcasts through BTV and WebTV

available in the BOUTube

Audio lecture also to be delivered through WebRadio and Bangadesh Betar

Tutorials

Local VET tutors

Course Lecturer should send SMS the topic to all tutors before tutorials;

Course Lecturer has connect tutors through Facebook Gruop, Google Groups with tutors

Skype, Viber, whatsup, will be used to monitor tutorials;

No-cost & Paperless

No-cost

Cost

Figure 3.6: Open School's TEDL Framework for VET

[Prepared from first researcher's PhD work]

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