

Evaluation of Tutors' Role: a case of Junior School Certificate (JSC) Program of the Open School of Bangladesh Open University in association with NGO coalition, Campaign for Popular Education

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1 INTRODUCTION

Open School (OS) of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) launched, in 2007, Junior School Certificate (JSC) Program for grade 6-8 in association with the NGO coalition, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), for the disadvantaged children of grade-5 pass graduated from the NGO schools. The main objective of this program is to ensure learning for development that is learners will be enterprising in getting jobs and setting new business (Matubber, 2007). Through this program, OS introduces the area-based vocational courses for bringing the economic balances. In this way, BOU OS has become an innovation centre of education program. Tutoring for this program has become a challenging effort as it combines vocational courses with general courses in consistent with regular mode of schooling. This paper discusses current state of tutoring and learner-focused evaluation of tutors' role of the JSC program. This paper also outlines the thinking and methodology employed for the program.

2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this paper is to evaluate tutors' role of the JSC program. It also discusses the arrangement of tutorial services in ODL centers in relation to sustainability. It achieves following objectives:

- to identify how the JSC tutoring differs from other program of the Open School
- to discover how a JSC tutor controls over learners in getting preparation for studies
- to see what extend the tutor motivates JSC learners in continuing their studies without getting dropouts from the program

3 METHODOLOGY

The evaluation activities use a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative approach adopted for student-focused evaluation. Questionnaires were supplied and range of responses was chosen by the learners, following feedback sessions. Learners' scored responses are entered to SPSS and analyzed using standard statistical methods. Students were also asked to make comments if they wish and these are considered with other qualitative input. Data also come from documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, and participant observation. This study involves interviews with learners and key informants, review of the meeting records, and observation. Field visits and personal cases have been used to draw the conclusion.

4 PROVISION FOR JSC PROGRAM

4.1 Background of BOU School Program

BOU has long history of media use at the school level. In fact, it came into existence through a long process of media use in education. The BOU Act of 1992 was the culmination of almost forty years of development in educational technology. 200 radio sets were provided to educational institutions through the Education Directorate in 1956. An Audio-Vision Cell was set up followed by the Audio Visual Education Centre (AVEC) in 1962. A School Broadcasting Program was established in 1978, and that pilot project was merged with AVEC in 1983 to form the National Institute of Educational Media and Technology (NIEMT). Subsequently, the Bangladesh Institute of Distance Education (BIDE) – the precursor of BOU – was established in 1985 and NIEMT was incorporated within it. Both AVEC and NIEMT were mainly involved in school broadcasting which was partial use of distance education. BIDE represented the first step towards fully fledged distance education in Bangladesh was merged with BOU. Therefore, use of distance education at the school level is the history of BOU. That's why Open School is the core faculty of BOU.

4.2 Open School Programs

OS runs Secondary School Certificate (SSC) for grade 9-10 and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) for grade 11-12. These programs contribute government's educational goal. Bangladesh has already achieved one of the MDGs related to the parity in the male-female ratio of enrolment in the formal secondary level. Open School's secondary enrolment has also the male-female parity ratio. It launched in 2007 JSC to support in achieving country's MDGs.

4.2 CAMPE Education Program

Over the decades, CAMPE has been striving to bring about positive changes in the education sector, particularly in primary and adult education. CAMPE has become an apex-body of NGOs who provides education for the disadvantaged. CAMPE attempts to reflect on the progress of the state initiatives towards achieving the MDGs and JSC came into existence as part of other activities in achieving the MDGs.

5 PARTNERSHIP BUILDING BETWEEN BOU AND CAMPE

CAMPE is fully specialized organization in imparting non-formal education and BOU is also having the full capacity to provide ODL at any level. As a result, a successful partnership has been developed between two apex-bodies of different kinds to fill in the gaps of schooling needs of the disadvantaged children who are graduated from NGO/community schools. For this program, BOU is being providing the academic support and CAMPE providing financial and secretarial supports. Both BOU and CAMPE are jointly ensuring the administrative supports to the ODL Centre through Regional Resources Centers (RRCs) and Local member NGOs respectively. JSC, the pre-University program, is the only program which has the partnership with the private body and its nature completely differs from other programs of BOU. Model for this program is shown in Fig. 2.

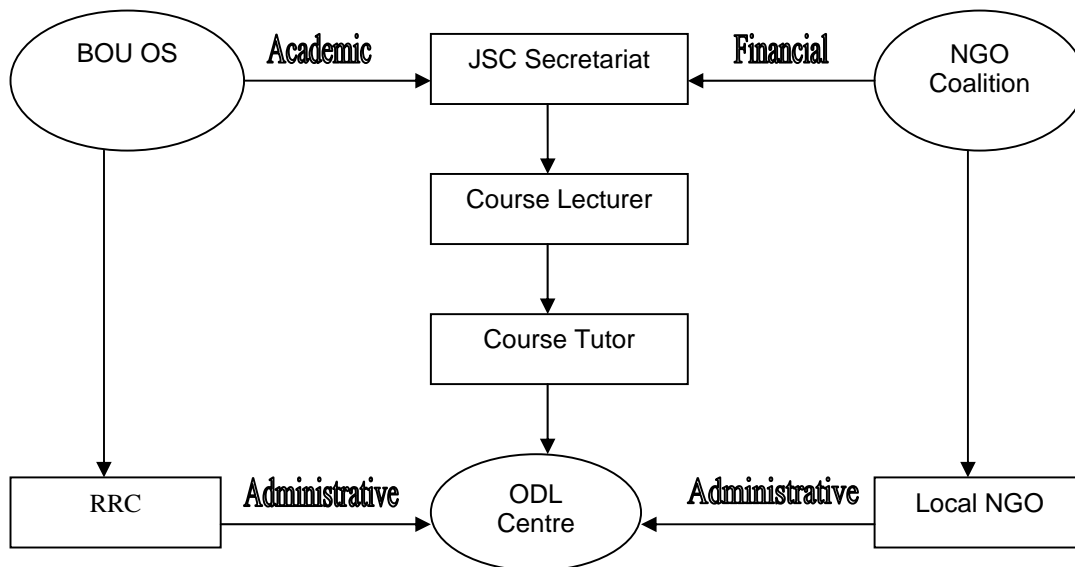


Fig: 2: JSC Model

5.1 ODL Centre

Study centre is termed as ODL centre for the JSC program. BOU termed study centre, for other programs, as Tutorial Centre (TC). Ipaye (1996) states that a study centre is a designated outpost for an ODL institution outside the headquarters, where students go to receive tutorials, meet support staff of the institution, get the study materials, take their examinations, meet other colleagues, carry out their practicals and other learning related activities for the promotion of their studentship. JSC ODL centers become the replica of the main institution, serving as a mini-

university in the locality and depicting the political presence of the government. ODL centre are satisfying the requirements of politics in education which is depicted objectives of the University:

“The role of the BOU will be primarily to cater to those sections of the population that are currently excluded from the conventional education system for a wide variety of reasons. The potential clientele of BOU will therefore include significant numbers of students of rural areas, particularly women, out of school and adults who must do work to support their families. (Source: BOU Project proforma (PP), June 1996.”

Ipaye (1996) affirms that a study centre can 'die' if learners stop visiting, if they stop coming for tutorials, if tutors stop coming etc. especially if such development is traceable to some derelictions or deprivations from the headquarters. This is very important for the JSC program because learners are very poor, sometimes ultra poor, and there is a likelihood that learners may not be interested to attend the tutorial centers for variety of soci-economic reasons. Many JSC learners, at the community meeting, reported feelings of isolation, monotony, lack of self-direction as well as self and time management difficulties and eventual decrease in motivation levels (Community Meeting at Ashroy, July 2007). Local NGO got the challenging responsibilities of monitoring the learner's activity through involving the supervisor. They are instructed to make the centre friendly, approachable, empathetic and familiar with learners' problems and possible solutions so that they can get interested to be attentive to their studies and attending the tutorial sessions.

8 TUTORING

As noted by Ipaye (1996) tutoring in ODL provides learners with a belonging to the institution; and a feeling of being students. In Bangladesh, the culture of face to face teaching is the main recognized mode of studentship and most people do not regard one as students if he/she do not have that face to face teaching; neither do they recognize his/her as an institution if that phase is missing. Distance Education has this problem; on the other hand ODL philosophy believes that learners have to be touched with the teachers so that they feel to be being students and it simplifies this situation by a network of tutorial centers, either owned or borrowed by the institution but the problem of quality; organization, monitoring etc. are obvious. ODL centre gives the learners with the institutional attachment which they use as identity in the society. Tutoring at the junior school level, where the program is being implemented through ODL mode, is very important.

8.1 How does tutoring work?

JSC tutors spend a minimum of two days per month at the ODL centers. Each tutoring session lasts for 45 minutes. Each tutoring session differs. The tutor designs their own lesson plan or tutoring protocol designed by the Course Lecturer who selects contents within the learner's reading range. The tutors at each ODL centre have a lead tutor, supervisor, or both that supervises tutoring sessions. No tutor is ever left alone with the learners while in a session. The JSC program prides itself on providing excellent tutors that ensure professional and productive tutoring sessions between learners and tutors.

8.2 Who are the tutors?

JSC secretariat hires at least degree pass teachers from local formal/NGO/community schools with excellent organizational, interpersonal and communication skills. Tutors for vocational courses are sometimes undergraduates who have a minimum 5 years experience in the course related activity, and who have received recommendation from the local NGO. In some cases, graduate students and first-year students of graduation may become tutors. Tutors work under a lead tutor and supervisor. Tutors provide academic support for all the learners on the courses they teach. Tutors are expected to monitor learners' progress and to encourage learners to form self-help groups. Tutor selects the group monitor and class monitor from the learners.

8.3 Who are Lead Tutors?

Lead Tutors are peer tutors who have attached with the local NGO either as employee or as a tutor for at least one year with other programs, and have received five days of additional training with facilitator of The Commonwealth of Learning. They are highly motivated and exceptional tutors. Occasionally they conduct new tutor training sessions, and act as mentors for other tutors. The lead tutor is effectively considered an "assistant manager" to the supervisor. Lead tutors actively tutor, but also provide assistance when needed to the supervisor, by observing sessions, acting as a leader when necessary, and performing some administrative tasks. Dependent on work study eligibility, Lead tutors work more than tutor.

8.4 Supervisor

The supervisor acts as the direct liaison between the participating NGO and the JSC program. The supervisor handles most in-school communications, organizes staff schedules, conducts ongoing meetings and staff training, and organizes semester events, such as parties or other activities. Supervisors have other administrative duties as well. They should have experience either working with children or in administrative roles in previous employment situations.

8.5 Tutor training

Distance teaching was new to the tutors of the program and it has become a challenging learning experience for both NGOs and them. That's why they were oriented with ODL system and trained in ODL system particularly in the tutoring so that they feel that learner's are distance from the learning facilities, their commitments, and their choice. They are the vital link to help individual learners and the part of the academic community of the OS. For JSC program, faculty member are assigned to teach a particular course and he/she becomes the Course Lecturer and Tutors of that course do what lecturer instructs through course profile. In this way, they become the Associate lecturer of that course. Therefore, tutor is the **medium of teacher** and placed as the frontline personnel in the JSC program delivery. Course lecturer determines the details content of tutorials and tutor may have to plan for tutorials although the dates and venue of the tutorial timetable is arranged. Tutorial sessions are fortnightly for all the courses in the program and held in the weekend. These face-to-face tutorials are the prime activity of the tutors which provides tutors with the satisfaction for sharing ODL with disadvantaged group of the society. Tutor becomes the regional academics also provide counseling. JSC Learners generally do not easily and willingly go for counseling. But it is very important for getting learners settle down. In the western countries, in a place, Councilors wait for learners to come to them to imbibe effective study habits, acquire efficient learning strategies and develop self monitoring techniques. Because of cultural and socio-economic reasons this doesn't work for the JSC. Counselors must go to the learners to find out what their problems are. Tutor's interaction as counselor which gives learners' the feeling that the OS is not too 'distant' from them both physically and emotionally. The Counselor fills this gap for the OS and for the individual learner by ensuring that the School gets to know about every individual registered student's progress, challenges and fears.

9 EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluation activities were undertaken through observation plus analysis of their responses to a questionnaire. 240 (12%) learners completed the questionnaire. Their responses to the generic statements are shown in the Table A below:

Table A: Tutors' evaluation summary

Criteria statements		percentage of learners giving each score					Mean Responses
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
n217	Tutors knowledge on subject matter			6%	30.4%	63.6%	4.58
n226	Understandability			8%	34.1%	58.0%	4.50

	of teaching						
n231	Punctuality of tutors			.4%	35.9%	63.6%	4.63
n227	Quick in tutorial sessions			52%	41%	7%	2.45
n227	Extra support via mobile phone	11.5%		.9%	31.3%	56.4%	4.21
n231	Tutor's interest in making topic clear			.4%	29.9%	69.7%	4.68
n234	Recommend friends for tutorials			4.7%	58.5%	36.8%	4.21
n233	Tutor's support for getting high score				69.9%	29.2%	4.70
n234	Admin support by tutors				64.2%	33.8%	4.66
	Overall comments	Learners asked for extra sessions for English and Mathematics					

Learner responses on the questionnaires were particularly positive with respect to the context of tutorial supports; inclusion of required tools; mechanisms for information and support; appropriateness of assessments; and the improvement of their knowledge and skills. The most negative response was to the suggestions that are related to the specific subject like English and Mathematics. Personal cases have been used to draw the conclusion. Following special cases are depicted below:

Tutors themselves made LDC (Learning Development Centers) within the ODL Centre-

"Tutors take extra care and provide supports in understanding the subject matters at the residence. When we find difficulty particularly in English and Mathematics, we come to the center in excess of schedule tutorial sessions and tutors help us." Interview: Sabina Akter, Lerner, Rupsha Multipurpose High School ODL Centre, Khulna.

Tutors are very intimates with the learners:

"I was absent for couple of tutorial sessions and suddenly my tutor went to my home. He asked me to know why I was absent from classes? He made me interested and I attended in the next session. The tutor found me with long nails and he cut my nails. I found him very affectionate and after that I became very impressed and did not miss any tutorial sessions. Now I am fully committed to finish JSC program." Interview: Rezuan Karim, JSC learners, School of Holy Child ODL Centre

This actually changed the overall situation of the learner's attendance at the ODL Centers. Tutors are instructed to keep a nail cutter and yarn for fixing shirts' button.

Tutors negotiate with the employer of the learners:

"I work for bronze pottery factory and was absent for couple of classes. Tutor found me working at the factory in Friday and this is the main reason for not attending the tutorial sessions. Tutor pursued to the employers and I was granted leave for every Friday for attending the classes." Interview: Rony, Learner of the Bank Colony ODL Centre, Savar

Tutors pursue for solving general problems:

“We found learners of some areas, mainly girls, work in the garments making factory could not attend tutorial sessions because factories are kept open in Fridays. This situation also noticed by Shirin Akter while addressing at the JSC Tutors Conference on 28 March 2008. Tutors made a declaration on issuing letter from the BOU to BGMEA (Bangladesh Garments Manufacturing and Exporting Association) informing the situation and grant leave the JSC learners for attending the tutorial sessions.” Address: Shirin Akter: JSC Tutor Conference, Dhaka 28 March 2008

10 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Tutors of the JSC have been found with quality tutoring activities. Assessments are deemed appropriate and the learners acknowledge improvements in their knowledge and skills. Relevance and clarity of tutoring are expected to be improved in all cases after this investigation with the learners. The qualitative evaluation exercises suggest this was more to do with the remote support than with the tutors' social role. This appears to be confirmed by the relatively high rating for the accessibility of the tutorials and high rating for support mechanisms. Some of the centres scored highest on both learning styles and support. The support mechanism most valued by learners, as expressed in interviews, was face-to-face sessions. Overall, ratings on the tutoring quality criteria were supported by qualitative learners' feedback. They provide a useful means and suggesting areas for further investigation and improvement. However, one aspect was raised by a number of students in face-to-face evaluation sessions on courses of English and Mathematics that is not covered by the generic set of criteria. This should be taken into account by developers of JSC and tutors who are concerned with the tutorials.

11 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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