

# **DEVELOPING MANAGERIAL SKILL THROUGH OPEN MODE MBA PROGRAMME: AN APPROACH FOR THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, BANGLADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY**

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### **1. Introduction**

Over the last twenty-five years after the independence, Bangladesh Economy has shifted from agrarian to more industrialized based. With the new wave of globalization, the country has adopted the open market economy as the vehicle of its economic development. The shifts in the state economy have created competitive pressures to the enterprise management. So due to the intense competition most of the organizations management emphasize on the development of management education and the need for suitable managerial skills (Putti, 1991, 8.). Among the modern management skills, the abilities to manage a change, to manage conflict and finally to apply systems approach in management are crucial. To develop these managerial skills, appropriate programmes are needed in the management education of a country. But, there has not been any marked development in the management education system in Bangladesh since independence (Razzaque, 1991.124). Management education in different conventional Universities is not sufficient to meet the growing demand of the modern management. In Bangladesh only five state universities including an institute and a few private universities have programmes in Business Administration. Moreover the programmes available in these conventional universities do not fit into the skill necessary to develop a large number of working managers of both the public and private sector enterprises of the country. The more important reason of the failure is that, this large number of working managers do not have enough time and space to attend a programme in any conventional method. Obviously, an open learning system is a must to develop the necessary professional skills of these management people. With an objective of meeting this education need, the School Of Business (SOB), Bangladesh Open University (BOU) decided to launch an MBA Program in October, 1998 which is the main context of this paper. However, the objective of this paper is to examine the open mode MBA programme of the SOB, BOU to know whether their programme can develop the managerial skill of its target group. The authors hope that this paper will provide necessary guidelines to the SOB,BOU to enrich its MBA Programme as well as another proposed MBA Programme under the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) Scheme. The research is naturally a secondary data based study. The sources of data are the regulation of the MBA programme, programme brochure, printed material on other distance education programme, etc. Although, the study is secondary data based, primary data through interviewing the Dean of the School, Faculty Member, Official & working managers have been collected to fit the need of relevant information of the study.

### **2. The Open Mode MBA programme of the School of Business (SOB), Bangladesh Open University.**

#### **2.1 Origin and objective of the programme**

The SOB, one of the six schools of BOU has designed the MBA programme in addition to its exiting programmes named Certificate in Management (CIM) and Graduate Diploma in Management (GDM). The School is going to launch its MBA programme with an objective of training the students to learn theoretical concepts and principles and relate these theories to the organizational practices. To achieve this objective, this programme has been designed by combining both theoretical and practical components. The target group of this programme is the group of managers in commerce and industry. Graduates from different disciplines will find opportunities to promote their efficiency at the higher level of management by acquiring necessary knowledge and skill in Accounting, Banking, Business Regulations, Economics,

Finance, Management and Marketing (SOB, 1998,5-6). The school has qualified and trained faculty to design and organize the programmes offered. The faculty is devoted to provide necessary guidelines and takes responsibility to maintain a quality education in the school. By this time the SOB has

selected the first intake of its MBA programme and is going to welcome the students of the MBA program in mid-November, 1998.

## 2.2 The Learners

### 2.2.1 Student's Enrolment

Until the study package of the MBA programme will be prepared, the SOB invites application once a year and thereafter it will invite twice a year. In the first batch the school has selected 200 students from shortlisted candidates. The shortlist has been prepared from 7500 applicants by using the following pointing system (Table - 1).

Table - 1. Pointing for selection

Certificate / Degree	Points for Division / Class		
	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Secondary School Certificate (S. S. C.)	5	3	1
Higher Secondary Certificate (H. S. C.)	5	3	1
Bachelor Degree (Pass)	6	4	1
Bachelor degree (Hons.)	7	5	2
Master Degree	2	1	0

An applicant will secure 1 more point for each additional recognized academic degree above Masters e.g. M.S/M. Phill. and will secure one tenth of total age as additional points.

### 2.2.2. Students Characteristics

The SOB, has failed to select candidates as it is targeted. Because only 20% of the selected students belong to the target group and the other 80% are Engineers and Army officers. This failure is due to its faulty pointing system. In the pointing system, the major emphasize is given on the previous academic grades, but no priority is assigned for job experience and category. Again out of the selected 20% target group only 75% students have previous education in business. On the other hand the SOB had no plan to attract female candidates, as because female students constitute only 5% of the total. Moreover the school fails to select a group which has a longer time to contribute to their organizations after taking this degree as 70% of the selected student are above 35 years age group.

### 2.2.3 Geographical Distribution

Because of its limited student support system the school initially is going to start its MBA programme only in four different regions of the country. Each region has quota of student's enrolment, as shown in the table below.

Table-2: Student Quota

Region	No. of Student
Dhaka	100
Chittagong	50
Rajshahi	25
Kushtia	25

Although the distance learning should not be restricted to a particular region, in this case this quota system is a type of restriction. Therefore equal opportunity is not ensured. However the quota allocation is decided according to the population density and importance of the region.

### 2.2.4 Student's views :

The selected students of the first intake indicate the following objectives of joining into this programme;

- i. to get a certificate for promotion in the job.
- ii. to build better career i.e. create a scope to switch over a private sector.
- iii. to improve professional skill.
- iv. to upgrade social status.
- v. to get personal satisfaction.

## 2.3 Programme Characteristics

### 2.3.1 Course Curriculum

The proposed MBA program of the SOB, BOU has 22 courses comprise 66 credit hours, i.e. each course is of exactly 3 credit hours. Of these courses, 17 are compulsory courses and 5 are electives. Elective course can be taken from different specialization such as Accounting, Banking, Economics, Finance, Management and Marketing.

Compulsory courses are split into five semesters as below:

Semester	Course Title
First Semester -	Principles of Management Principles of Marketing Financial Accounting Micro Economics
Second Semester -	Business Mathematics Business Communication Business Statistics for Decision Making Organizational Behavior Analysis
Third Semester -	Management Accounting Marketing management Fundamentals of Financial Management Macro Economics Human Resource Management.
Fourth Semester -	Management Information System Operations Management International Trade and Finance Elective I Elective II
Fifth Semester -	Strategic Management Elective III Elective IV Elective V Masters Paper

Objectives of each course, contents and guidelines to follow the course have been written in a 15-20 Pages study- guide. The school is preparing study-guide for each course and will be supplied to students. In the first semester of the first batch, the school will use text books available in the market. For this purpose, the SOB has purchased requisite number of books for all students and the cost of these books are included in the fees charged at the admission. But in future the SOB will print text books written by a panel of experts from different conventional universities and in-house faculty. The books in that case, will be self-explanatory and suitable for open learning. In the same way, audio-video-cassettes will be prepared for the programme.

In this curriculum, students from non-business background might be in trouble to follow the courses as there is no deficiency course to fit them into the programme. In the compulsory courses a few courses are not up to the graduate level. The deficiency of the non-business graduates can not be recovered by offering courses of under graduate level. Again the core courses do not cover all the required areas of the business, while it is said that any MBA Programme should cover the following core courses (Bickerstaffe, 1996, 19)

- Accountancy
- Marketing
- Finance
- HRM
- Information Management
- Marketing
- Organizational Behavior
- Quantitative Analysis

Then it is argued that, the area of specialization is not as specific as possible and moreover, it is not need based while there is no specialization on HRM, MIS and International Business.

It indicates that, the target group of the SOB will find limited scope to meet their professional skill to face the challenges of their environment.

### 2.3.2 Programme Delivery

In an open mode MBA Program, the delivery system can be administered by using different medias listed below, (The Open University, 1997,7)

- ⊗ Print
- ⊗ Telephone
- ⊗ Audio Cassette
- ⊗ Video Cassette
- ⊗ Fax machine
- ⊗ Computer disk
- ⊗ Audio conferencing
- ⊗ Video conferencing
- ⊗ Computer conferencing
- ⊗ E-mail
- ⊗ Internet

In the open mode MBA Program of the SOB, BOU has designed delivery system with a combination of the following methods.

- (a) Use of printed material (text books, study guide, Dean's letter) to ensure learning
- (b) Audio-cassette prepared by in-house faculty
- (c) One-hour television broad casting by leading academics of the country
- (d) Conducting 8 tutorial classes for each course by the professors of the local conventional universities at different regions.

Professor John Dekkers (1998) found that, in the distance learning Bangladeshi students face a few problems

- Isolation
- Insufficient time to study
- Less organized in study
- Lack of resources and equipment
- Poor study techniques.

Even though Mr. Dean of the SOB, BOU argued that, the first intake of the MBA programme are highly motivated and high caliber qualities, the same problems described by the professor might be faced by this student group too.

One of the features of the development of open and distance learning (ODL) during the last 25 to 30 years has been the extraordinary variety of approaches to facilitating student learning (The Open University, 1997, 10). The development stages of the approaches to the distance learning can be explained in the chart below;

<u>Time Period</u>	<u>Approach</u>
First Generation	Printed Material Coupled with correspondence tuition.
Second Generation	Supplemented to printed material
1930s-1940s	Radio Broadcasting
1950s -	Television Broadcasting
1970s-	Video Cassettes
1980s-	CD ROMs
Third Generation, 1990s-	Video- Conferencing Teleconferencing

The major problem of using printed material is that it is both slow and impersonal. (The Open University, 1997,7). Even though, the Open Universities of Hongkong, Taipei and Korea still use this media as the principal medium (The Open University, 1997, 49). But student- tutor and student-student interaction is just as important in distance education as in traditional classroom based education. (The Open University, 1997, 11). It emphasized that technology based media should be used to supplement printed material. But, the disadvantages of the second generation media is that, these systems do not encourage interactivity. Now, in most of the open learning in Australia, Newzeland, Britain and USA, the programme delivery is supplemented by technology- based teleconferencing, Computer based interacting, video conferencing and interactive TV. While, the SOB has no technological support to enable its students interaction with the tutor and their batch friends.

### 2.3.3. Student Evaluation:

There is a variety of methods for assessing distance education courses. Examples include: (The Open University, 1997, 12)

- Self assessment exercises
- Continuous assessment
- Assignments
- Examinations
- Dissertation/ Thesis work
- Work based projects.

In the SOB, a student is to go through an assessment procedure of 100 marks comprises, two Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs) and one semester end examination for each course.

TMAs-	20 Marks
One Semester end Examination	80 Marks

So, this school uses both assignment and examination while there is no self assessment and continuous evaluation systems. Tutor Marked Assignments are to be submitted before the semester final examination. At the end of each semester, the student is to appear at the final examination- (MBA Regulation. 1998,7)

### 2.3.4 Administration of the Programme:

BOU was established by an act of the Parliament, Peoples Republic of Bangladesh. The SOB is running with in the University Administrative framework. The school has trained and qualified faculty who plan and organize the detail of the offered programme. Total faculty strength is 11 in which two Professors, Seven Assistant Professors, and two Lectures are working. The faculty consists of a group of brilliant and trained persons. The support staffs of the SOB are three computer operators, one office assistant and three peons. In addition, the school has appointed Professors of conventional Universities to prepare reading material and to conduct tutorial class.

## 3. Suggestive Approach to the SOB MBA Programme

Due to major changes of liberalization, deregulation and modernization, today's mangers face new challenges. Organizations have to adopt necessary steps to coup with a new changing situation. Mangers of different business organizations are either want to develop their professional skill in the existing workplace or they are interested to go for better job opportunities in other organizations. Non business graduates working as mangers and key position holders in different organizations are facing problems without management know how. In the objective of the Open MBA Programme the SOB mentioned to impart managerial skill. The target group is the mangers of trade and commerce, but the admission procedure of the first intake has limited this group to 20% only. Even though the brochure indicates that the programme is a combination of both theoretical and practical components, the curriculum and program delivery show that the courses offered are not suitable to meet the new challenges of the national and international environment. While in most of the open learning in the developed world, the courses cover all requisite deficiencies of the target group. The students are assigned work related problems and cases are being solved. It is said that in the Asia-Pacific region, the Distance Learning will face the following challenges:

- a) Designing a relevant and appropriate curriculum to meet the demands of the target group;
- b) Providing sensitive and sensible student support system;
- c) Using technology based instruction to facilitate interaction.

The SOB is not an exception in facing such challenges. If, the school tries to develop managerial skill necessary for the target group, the challenges should be shouldered with the utmost care. But it is observed that with the present system the SOB is not in a position to face these challenges properly. As because the proposed curriculum does not fit into the demand of the professional group first. Secondly, the program delivery is only printed medium based and it is not supplemented by technology based interactivity system. And finally the printed material is not suitable for Open Learning and the system lacks appropriate student support system. According to an observation, the programme lacks these student support and technology based learning due to the poor infrastructure of the school and delayed project implementation. It has a plan to introduce need based teaching support through multimedia center of the school. Still there is a good hope for the programme that the SOB is working to supply suitable text material and to supplement by its multimedia service. Senior faculty of the school are trying to have ideas from advanced country and even from better school in the neighboring country. It is experienced from the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) that it has more learner oriented multimedia approach for instruction which includes written material combining both theory and practical components; audio visual material aids; counseling sessions and telecounselling. Therefore, SOB should have an effective approach to MBA programme to develop managerial skill of its target group at least with this IGNOU standard. In this respect the school can go for an effective approach with the following suggestions:

1. A useful admission procedure to be followed to ensure the entrance of the target group students.
2. Need-based courses to be introduced to meet the demand of the professional managers.
3. Deficiency course should be available for the non-business graduate.
4. In absence of technological support more student teacher interaction by using tutorial class and audio visual material aids.
5. Self explanatory reading material with a combination of theory and practical components
6. If possible, multimedia approaches to instruction should be supplemented to the main medium.
7. Continuous evaluation through more work related assignments and case solutions should be introduced.

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