

Challenges of Field Level Staff of Bangladesh Open University to Expedite Better Implementation of B.Ed and M.Ed Programs: An Analysis

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Abstract

This study was carried out to identify the challenges of field level staff of Bangladesh Open University to expedite better implementation of B.Ed and M.Ed programs. Data were collected by administering 3 different tools (Questionnaire, Interview schedule & FGD schedule) to the staff of 6 Regional Centers (RC, Dhaka; RC, Chattogram; RC, Rajshahi; RC, Khulna; RC, Barisal and RC, Sylhet) of Bangladesh Open University. The questionnaire was scaled like a Likert-type with a five point rating ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Questionnaire was administered to 48 staff (8 staff/RC), Interview schedule was administered to 12 staff (2 staff/RC) and FGD schedule was administered to 30 staff (1 FGD including 5 staff/RC). So the total sample size was 90 (48+12+30). However, the major findings of the study from quantitative data analysis revealed that the highest agree response ($M=3.62$) of the respondents belonged to the challenges outlined under the area "Examination management challenges". On the other hand, the lowest response ($M=2.62$) belonged to the challenges under the area "Coordination related challenges". This study further indicated that the proposed measures outlined under each area got the agree response ($M>3.00$) regarding "Things to do for overcoming the challenges". The highest agree response ($M=4.39$) belonged to the proposed measures under the area "Things to do for overcoming infrastructural challenges" whereas the lowest agree response ($M=4.06$) of the respondents belonged to the proposed measures under the area "Things to do for overcoming examination management challenges". Apart from this, qualitative data analysis revealed that professional and coordination related challenges are the main challenges for the staff of Regional Centers of BOU.

Keywords: Challenge, Better Implementation, Field Level Staff, Regional Center, Bangladesh Open University.

Introduction

Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is the prime institution of open and distance education in Bangladesh which was established in 1992 by an ACT of Parliament. Delivery mode of BOU's education programs is different from that of other traditional universities. BOU is using a blended education

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delivery mode, where self-learning is the main focus. Students are supported by face to face tutorial services in the Study Centers (SC) located nearby their workplaces and doorsteps all over the country. The mission of BOU is to spread quality education, both general and need specific, among all sections of citizens of the country, irrespective of their age and gender in a flexible manner by using a suitable mix of educational media and technologies. Distance mode B.Ed and M.Ed are two leading teacher education programs of Bangladesh Open University offered by School of Education (SoE). SoE has been operating the B.Ed program successfully since the emergence of the University in 1992 and M.Ed program from 2000. B.Ed and M.Ed programs are mainly run by different study centers like other programs of BOU. Twelve (12) Regional Centers (RCs) and 80 Sub-Regional Centers (SRCs) of Bangladesh Open University which are located all over Bangladesh play a vital role in running the programs smoothly. These RCs and SRCs provide every types of support for the learners and frequently communicate with SoE which is the program offering entity and with respective study centers. To achieve the goal of B.Ed and M.Ed programs all staff of RCs and SRCs have to perform important roles in many areas specifically providing administrative and logistic supports to the learners as per the instruction of BOU and SoE. As the staffs are involved with many activities regarding B.Ed and M.Ed programs they have to face different types of challenges during running the programs. This study- ***Challenges of Field Level Staff of Bangladesh Open University to Expedite Better Implementation of B.Ed and M.Ed Programs: An Analysis*** aimed to identify the challenges of field level staff and also to find out the ways to overcome the challenges.

Problem Statement

A research problem is the educational issues, controversies, or concerns that guide the need for conducting a study (Creswell, 2015). This study focuses on the particular issues or concerns in terms of better implementation of B.Ed and M.Ed programs offered by School of Education, BOU. There are 12 Regional Centers (RCs) and 80 Sub-Regional Centers (SRCs) of Bangladesh Open University. Along with different study centers of B.Ed and M.Ed programs, these RCs and SRCs play a vital role in running the programs smoothly. Those who are working in these RCs and SRCs are known as field level staff of BOU. There are Regional Director (RD), Deputy Regional Director (DRD), Assistant Regional Director (ARD), Administrative Officer (AO), Accounts Officer and other staff in these field offices. Considering their roles and responsibilities, it is very important to identify the obstacles which they have to face throughout the program period. What are their main challenges? What measures should be taken to overcome these challenges? The main concern of this study was to investigate the answers of these questions.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study were-

- to identify the challenges of field level staff of Bangladesh Open University to expedite better implementation of B.Ed and M.Ed programs.
- to find out the ways to overcome the challenges of field level staff of Bangladesh Open University to expedite better implementation of B.Ed and M.Ed programs.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives, this study was carried out to find out the answers of the following research questions:

- 1) What are the main challenges of field level staff of Bangladesh Open University to expedite better implementation of B.Ed and M.Ed programs?
- 2) What measures should be taken to overcome the challenges?

Rationale of the Study

School of Education (SoE) offers B.Ed and M.Ed programs to meet up the increasing demand of teacher education in Bangladesh. Bangladesh Open University has 12 Regional Centers (RCs) and 80 Sub-Regional Centers (SRCs). Like other distance mode programs of BOU, B.Ed and M.Ed programs are mainly implemented by these RCs and SRCs with the help of different study centers who are mainly responsible for conducting the programs. But the staff of RCs and SRCs have to face different challenges during the implementation stages. This study identified the challenges and also helped to find out the ways to overcome the challenges so that the concerned authority of BOU will take necessary steps in this regard. As a result, B.Ed and M.Ed programs will be organized and run more effectively. Bangladesh will be adorned with a large number of skilled, trained and effective teachers as well as education professionals. If educational management system is monitored properly, B.Ed and M.Ed programs of Bangladesh Open University will provide a good number of skilled manpower in different education sectors which will be beneficiary for the whole nation ultimately. This study might also provide necessary guidelines for the researchers who are intended to work in this arena in future.

Literature Review

A literature review can broadly be described as a more or less systematic way of collecting and synthesizing previous research (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Tranfield, Denyer & Smart, 2003). An effective and well-conducted review as a research method creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge and facilitating theory development (Webster & Watson, 2002). By integrating

findings and perspectives from many empirical findings, a literature review can address research questions with a power that no single study has. Literature reviews can also be useful if the aim is to engage in theory development (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Torraco, 2005). Teacher Education in a distance mode had already been used extensively to supplement the traditional college-based approach in a wide range of developing countries, particularly in Africa (e.g. Brophy & Dudley, 1981, 1982, 1983; Perraton, 1984, 1993; Coldevin & Naidu, 1989) – and in, for example, Australia (Evans & Nation, 1991, 1993) and the United Kingdom (Prescott & Robinson, 1993). As long ago as the early 1980s, Brophy & Dudley reported that over 60 distance education programs for teacher education had been established in more than 40 countries for a variety of purposes: initial training of teachers about to enter the teaching force, or already teaching. Technical developments have greatly contributed for the development of distance education (Daniel & Mega, 1996; Rumble & Oliveria, 1999).

Responsibility of Field Level Staff of BOU regarding B.Ed/M.Ed Program

Along with School of Education the field level staff of BOU has an important role to conduct B.Ed and M.Ed programs. The main responsibilities of field level staff of Bangladesh Open University in running B.Ed and M.Ed programs are given below-

- Distributing teaching aids to the students
- Distributing students' ID card
- Informing the examination schedule to the students
- Preparing exam attendance sheets of the B.Ed/M.Ed examinees
- Sending exam attendance sheets to the study center related to RC
- Full time communication with the students
- Resolving the complicity of the exam result of the students
- Distributing certificates/mark sheets among the students of B.Ed/M.Ed program
- Communicating with B.Ed/M.Ed program coordinators of respective study centers
- Communicating with School of Education (SoE)
- Communicating with the Students' Support Services (SSS) division regarding B.Ed/M.Ed program related issues
- Communicating with BOU Exam Division for exam related issues
- Calculating the remuneration of the tutors
- Distributing the cheque of remuneration to the tutors
- Calculating the center fee of B.Ed/M.Ed exam
- Sending the cheque of center fee of B.Ed/M.Ed exam to the study center

- Consulting with the respective person of Computer Division for uploading different necessary information of B.Ed/M.Ed program to the website
- Sending the necessary demand list of books to BOU head office for the enrolled students of B.Ed/M.Ed program
- Communicating with the higher authority of BOU for any issue related to B.Ed/M.Ed program if necessary

Methodology of the Study

A research design concerns a plan involving several decisions associated with carrying out that research (Creswell, 2009; Robson, 2002). As mentioned already, the main objective of this study was to identify the challenges of field level staff of Bangladesh Open University as well as to find out the ways to overcome the challenges to expedite better implementation of B.Ed and M.Ed programs. So this study included the following activities:

- Developing the research tools i.e. questionnaire, interview schedule and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) schedule for the field level staff of Bangladesh Open University regarding B.Ed and M.Ed Programs.
- Administering the questionnaire to the field level staff, conducting the interviews and arranging Focus Group Discussion (FGD) at selected Regional Centers (RCs) to identify the challenges as well as the ways to overcome the challenges to expedite better implementation of B.Ed and M.Ed programs.

Strategy of Inquiry

Detailed knowledge about different strategies in research is important for any investigation. It helps to understand and have insight into different methods before planning an investigation (Bell, 2018). This study followed mixed method (both qualitative and quantitative) approach that helped to shed light on the research problem and provide answers to the research questions in an appropriate manner. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. From Primary sources, in depth information was collected through quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative survey included mainly Questionnaire. On the other hand, the qualitative survey included Intensive Interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Documents, Research reports and articles were the basis of secondary source of information.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Among the 12 Regional Centers (RCs) of Bangladesh Open University 6 Regional Centers (RC, Dhaka; RC, Chattogram; RC, Rajshahi; RC, Khulna; RC, Barishal and RC, Sylhet) from 6 administrative divisional cities of Bangladesh were selected purposively to conduct the study. Data were collected from the staff of 6 Regional Centers (RCs). The details of the data collection procedures including sample is mentioned in Table 01.

Table 01: Data collection procedures including sample

Tools/Technique	Participants	Sample/No. of participants
Questionnaire (Likert scale type)	Staff of 6 Regional Centers (RCs)	Total number of participants was 48 (8 staff/RC).
Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	Staff of 6 Regional Centers (RCs)	Total number of participants was 30. [Six (6) FGD were conducted in 6 Regional Centers (RCs) and 5 staff from a RC took part in each FGD]
Intensive Interview	Staff of 6 Regional Centers (RCs)	Total number of participants was 12 (2 staff/RC).
Total sample size = 90		

Conceptual Framework

This study was organized by considering some important aspects of distance mode teacher education programs. It was conducted in 3 main segments and these segments were bridged by another part. Firstly, the concept of distance mode teacher education program was discussed. Then the challenges faced by field level staff of Bangladesh Open University in running B.Ed/M.Ed program were identified. Thus the ways to overcome the challenges were chalked out accordingly. It should be mentioned that there were mainly 6 types of challenges and specific challenges were included in each type of challenge. These challenges and the ways to overcome the challenges worked as the blueprint to develop the research instruments.

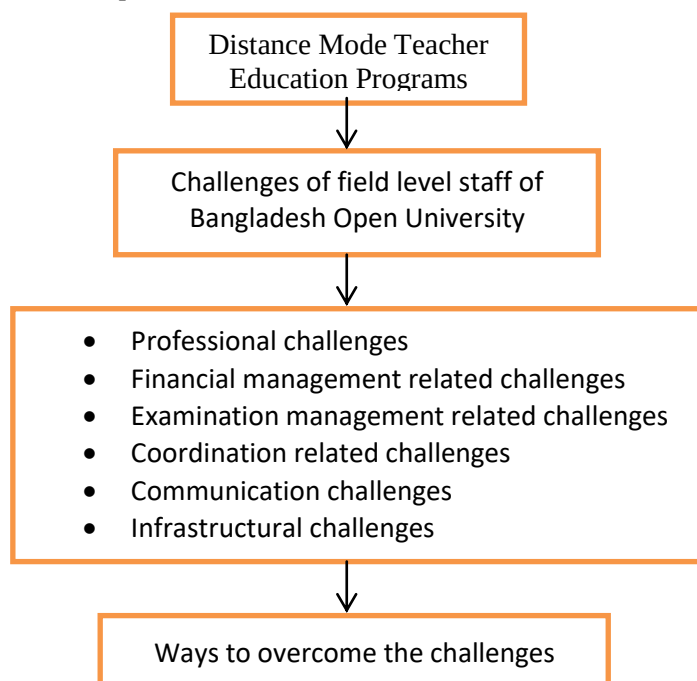


Figure-01: Conceptual Framework of challenges faced by the field level staff of BOU and the ways to overcome the challenges

Data Processing Procedure

As the sample size was small, data were processed through manually and computer application. For quantitative analysis the raw scores were filed and batched according to different strata and task programs to enable easy operation for later processing steps (editing, coding, entry etc). The data were then processed and analyzed through Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS). It is imperative to note that the responses of the participants against each Likert type statement were considered as 1(strongly disagree), 2(disagree), 3(neutral), 4(agree) and 5(strongly agree). As the range was from 1 to 5, the mid-point was 3 (neutral). Therefore, the combined mean score for the items was greater than 3 indicated that respondents' responses were tended to agree. The closer the mean was to 5, the higher the extent of the agree response. For qualitative analysis, the data obtained from the test scripts manually and then it was processed analytically in a narrative way.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

In this section, percentage distribution of the respondents regarding their responses on Likert type items are presented and discussed.

Views of field level staff of BOU towards challenges under 6 different areas in running B.Ed/M.Ed program

It is apparent from the data presented in Table 02 that challenges under 4 different areas among 6 areas got the agree response ($M > 3.00$). It is also evident that the highest agree response ($M = 3.62$) belonged to the challenges outlined under the area "Examination management challenges" followed by "Infrastructural challenges" ($M = 3.26$). The data presented in the table shows that the lowest response ($M = 2.62$) belonged to the challenges under the area "Coordination related challenges" followed by "Financial management related challenges" ($M = 2.64$). It is also notable that Standard Deviation (SD) against the responses on challenges under all the areas was significant ($SD > 0.50$) which indicated that the data points not tended to be close to the mean.

Table 02: Views of field level staff of BOU towards challenges under different areas

Sl. No.	Challenges under different areas in running B.Ed/M.Ed Program	Number of Items (N)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Min	Max
1.	Professional challenges in running B.Ed/M.Ed program	10	3.10	1.194	1	5
2.	Financial management related challenges in running B.Ed/M.Ed Program	5	2.64	1.124	1	5

3.	Examination management challenges in running B.Ed/M.Ed program	5	3.62	1.191	1	5
4.	Coordination related challenges in running B.Ed/M.Ed program	8	2.62	1.148	1	5
5.	Communication challenges in running B.Ed/M.Ed program	5	3.17	1.077	1	5
6.	Infrastructural challenges in running B.Ed/M.Ed program	3	3.26	1.178	1	5

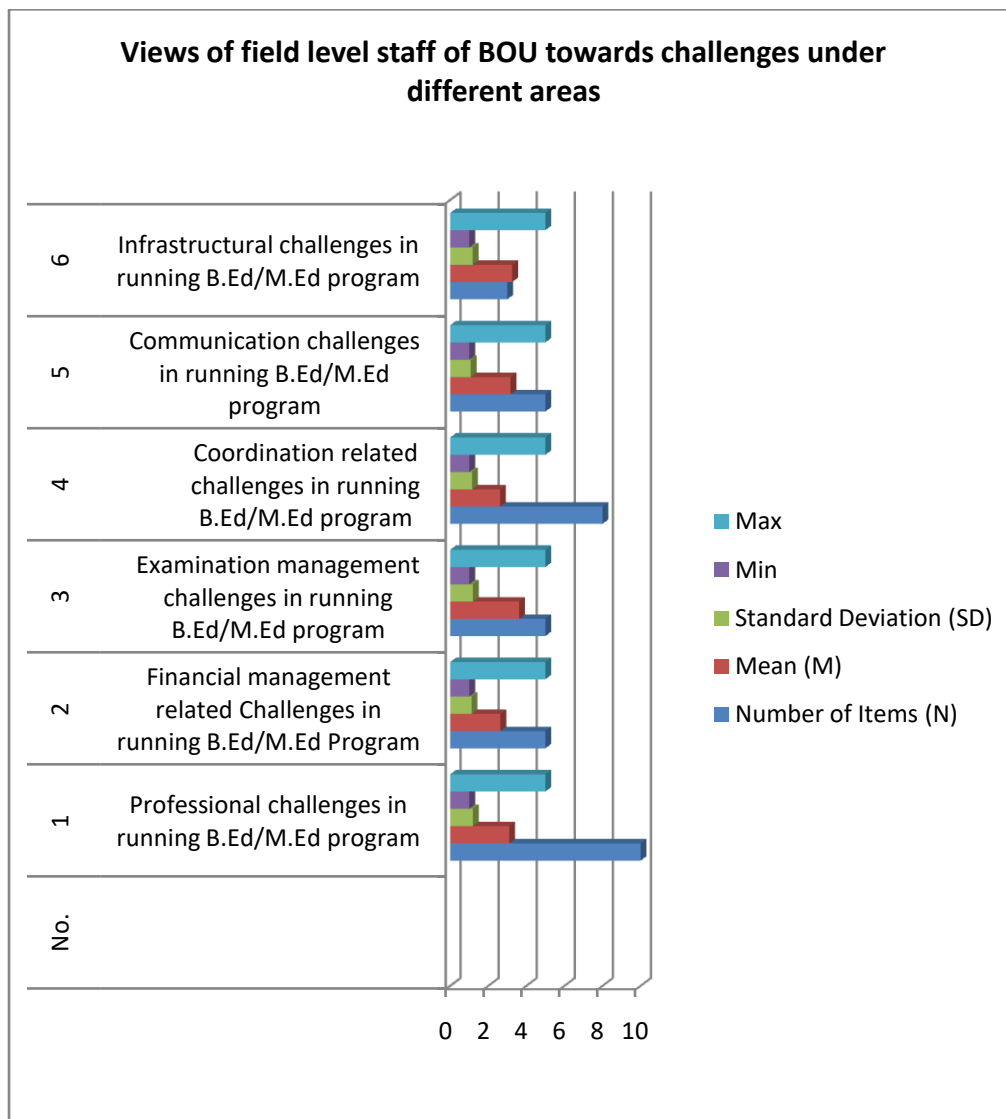


Figure 02: Views of field level staff of BOU towards challenges under different areas

Views of field level staff of BOU towards things to do for overcoming the challenges under 6 different areas in running B.Ed/M.Ed program

It is evident from the data presented in Table 03 that each area got the high agree response ($M > 3.00$). It is also apparent that the highest agree response ($M = 4.39$) belonged to the proposed measures under the area “Things to do for overcoming infrastructural challenges” followed by “Things to do for overcoming coordination related challenges” ($M = 4.17$) and “Things to do for overcoming communication challenges” ($M = 4.17$). The data appeared in the table shows that the lowest agree response ($M = 4.06$) belonged to the proposed measures under the area “Things to do for overcoming examination management challenges” followed by “Things to do for overcoming professional challenges” ($M = 4.08$) and “Things to do for overcoming financial management related Challenges” ($M = 4.10$). It is also notable that Standard Deviation (SD) against the responses on “Things to do for overcoming challenges” outlined under all areas was significant ($SD > 0.50$) which indicated that the data points not tended to be close to the mean.

Table 03: Views of field level staff of BOU towards things to do for overcoming challenges under different areas

Sl. No.	Things to do for overcoming challenges under different areas in running B.Ed/M.Ed Program	Number of Items (N)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Min	Max
1.	Things to do for overcoming professional challenges in running B.Ed/M.Ed program	10	4.08	1.032	1	5
2.	Things to do for overcoming financial management related Challenges in running B.Ed/M.Ed Program	5	4.10	0.80	1	5
3.	Things to do for overcoming examination management challenges in running B.Ed/M.Ed program	5	4.06	0.899	2	5
4.	Things to do for overcoming coordination related challenges in running B.Ed/M.Ed program	8	4.17	0.683	1	5
5.	Things to do for overcoming communication challenges in running B.Ed/M.Ed program	5	4.17	0.809	1	5
6.	Things to do for overcoming infrastructural challenges in running B.Ed/M.Ed program	3	4.39	0.613	2	5

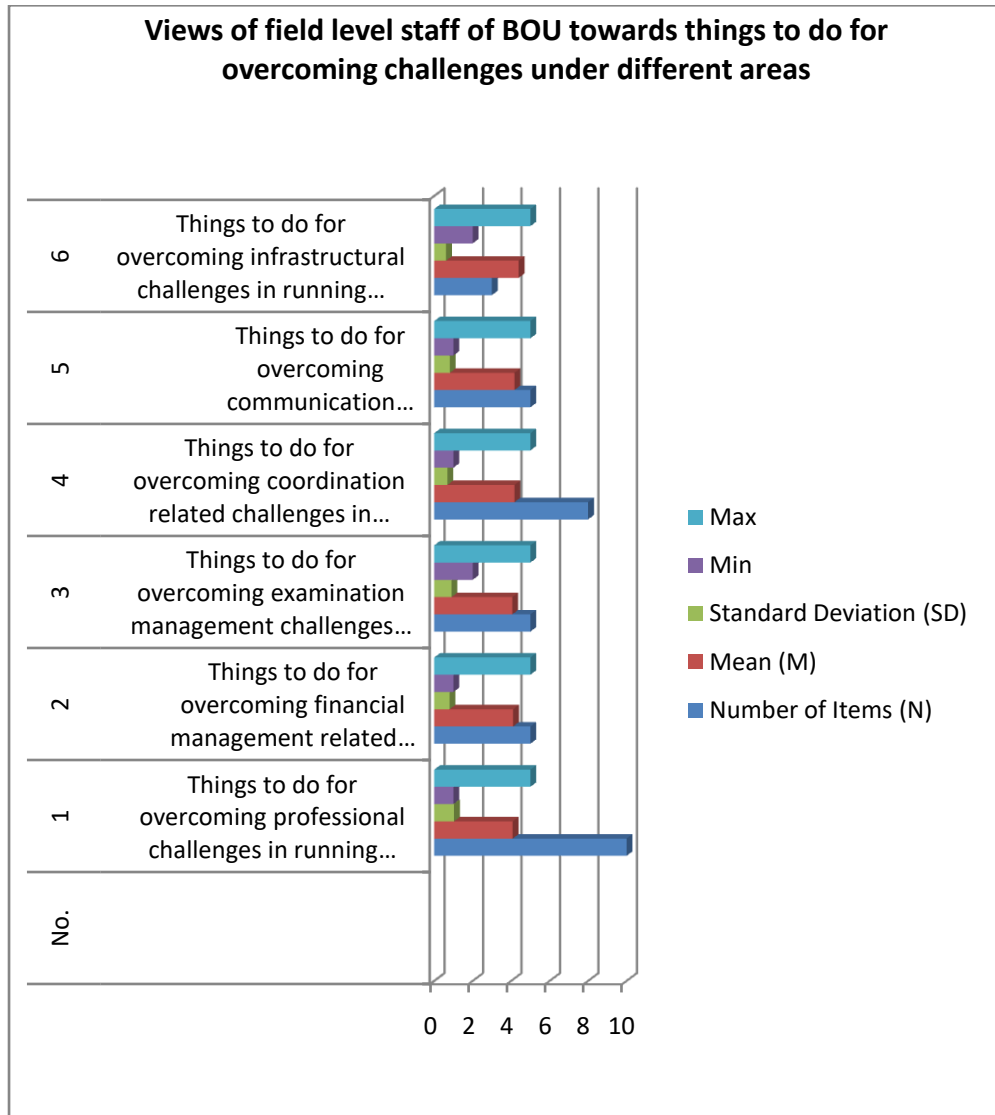


Figure 03: Views of field level staff of BOU towards things to do for overcoming challenges under different areas

Major findings

This study indicated the following major findings based on analysis of quantitative and qualitative data.

Major findings from quantitative data analysis

- Among the respondents, only 8.33% had pedagogical degree.
- Most of the respondents (66.67%) didn't participate in any training/workshop related to B.Ed/M.Ed program.

- The highest agree response (M=3.62) of the respondents belonged to the challenges outlined under the area “Examination management challenges”.
- The lowest response (M=2.62) belonged to the challenges under the area “Coordination related challenges”.
- Standard Deviation (SD) against the responses on challenges under all the areas was significant (SD>0.50) which indicated that the data points not tended to be close to the mean.
- The proposed measures outlined under each area got the agree response (M>3.00) regarding “Things to do for overcoming the challenges.
- The highest agree response (M=4.39) belonged to the proposed measures under the area “Things to do for overcoming infrastructural challenges”.
- The lowest agree response (M=4.06) of the respondents belonged to the proposed measures under the area “Things to do for overcoming examination management challenges”.
- Standard Deviation (SD) against the responses on “Things to do for overcoming challenges” outlined under all areas was also significant (SD>0.50) which indicated that the data points not tended to be close to the mean.

Major findings from qualitative data analysis

➤ Major challenges of the regional centers in running B.Ed/M.Ed program smoothly

- Due to lack of manpower, one officer of the regional center has to conduct 7/8 programs of BOU at a time. Therefore, it is not possible to provide the regular service properly and quickly.
- There is a lack of coordination among all the departments i.e. School of Education, Student Support Services (SSS) Division (including Regional Centers), Examination Division, Computer Division of BOU. Therefore the publications of flawless examination results in due time are hindered.
- Study materials, student ID cards and examination materials are not reached at the regional center in time.
- There is a scarcity of ICT equipment in regional centers.
- Proposal for the appointment of tutors/coordinators are not reached at the regional centers in time.
- Bill payment is delayed because of not receiving tutors’/coordinators’ approval appointment letter at the regional centers timely.
- Insufficient remuneration of the coordinators, tutors, office staff of the tutorial centers.
- Regional center has no authority to resolve any sudden complications immediately regarding examination issues.

- **The measures which should be taken to overcome the challenges of the regional centers in running B.Ed/M.Ed program smoothly**
 - The manpower of the regional centers should be increased.
 - There must be a good coordination of work among School of Education, SSS Division, Examination Division, Regional Centers and Study Centers.
 - Study materials, students' ID card and examination related materials must be reached at the regional center in a timely manner.
 - Remuneration of the coordinators, tutors and office staff of the tutorial center should be increased.
 - Some incentive should be allocated for the B.Ed/M.Ed program related employees of the regional centers.
 - Regional center should have the required capacity to prepare the examination attendance sheet immediately if any inconsistency is found during the examination.
- **Expectation from School of Education (SoE) to overcome the challenges**
 - Improve the relationship between the faculty members of the School of Education with the staff of Regional Centers.
 - Immediate solutions to the problems of the regional centers can be done through exchanging views with School of Education.
 - Coordination meetings should be held with regional centers on a regular basis regarding various issues.
 - After sending academic information through e-mail, it needs to be confirmed by telephone.
 - Training can be provided to the employees of the regional centers on important issues.
- **Expectation from BOU authority to overcome the challenges**
 - BOU authority should keep an eye so that students can complete the program within the stipulated time.
 - Take necessary and acceptable steps for conducting examinations and doing necessary research properly.
 - Arrangements have to be taken for training and workshop for those who involved in B.Ed/M.Ed program in the regional centers.
 - Meetings should be organized to exchange views and opinions between regional centers, coordinators, tutors and BOU authority.
 - BOU authority can take necessary steps to send study materials at the right time.
 - Examination results related complications can be eliminated through coordination between examination division with School of Education.

Conclusion

The field level staffs of Bangladesh Open University play a vital role in running the programs offered by Bangladesh Open University. This study- **Challenges of Field Level Staff of Bangladesh Open University to Expedite Better Implementation of B.Ed and M.Ed Programs: An Analysis** revealed that they had to face different types of challenges to conduct B.Ed and M.Ed programs which created obstacles in running the programs smoothly. This situation is not acceptable and it must be changed. So, priority and attention should be given to find out the reasons behind the present situation and necessary steps should be taken at the earliest time to improve the situation. Field level staffs of BOU are the main implementers of distance mode programs along with the tutors and coordinators of respective study centers. So it is very important to recognize their views towards the implementation and development process of the programs. As this study also discovered the views of the field level staffs regarding the ways to overcome the challenges, necessary measures should be taken immediately by BOU authority considering their opinion.

Recommendations

On the basis of the major findings of this study, the researchers considered the following recommendations:

- Proper coordination among different divisions of BOU and School of Education should be developed.
- BOU should take immediate measures for timely holding of the examination of the B.Ed and M.Ed programs and publishing the results within a maximum four months from the time of examination held.
- A joint committee of the SoE and the examination division should be formed to identify the reasons of delaying in examination and result declaration and take action accordingly.
- Priority should be given to develop the program and exam monitoring system of BOU.
- BOU Website should be updated on a regular basis.
- Measures should be taken by BOU to make sure the use of required infrastructural and technological facilities in the RCs.
- Permanent student help desk should be established in the RCs.
- The student support services provided by the RCs should be made more student friendly.
- A staff development policy for capacity building of the non-academics should be formulated and staff development should be conducted accordingly.
- To meet the huge demand of continuous professional development of the employee of BOU, a training institute could be established.

- Develop a mechanism for mentoring and guidance of the newly appointed staff of field offices to make them able to be integrated with the working environment of BOU and to prepare them for the best delivery of their contribution to the institution.

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