

PAPER DETAILS

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PAGES: 55-60

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/156442>

Developing Course Materials for Open and Distance Learning: BOU Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Developing course materials for Open and distance learning is a continuous process. A variety of staffs with a wide range of expertise are involved in producing a distance education course. That means a team of academics involved in distance education will be responsible to develop each program. The material development strategies for each subject is centered on the team approach to compare teaching techniques for traditional and distance learning and emphasize the need for planning and the role of each team member. Coordinator, authors, referee, instructional designers, editors (structural and style editor), graphic artists, and media specialists are included in the team. Sometimes times they meet together and to discuss and finalize the ultimate layout of a course book. This paper discusses how to design and develop distance learning course materials and how Bangladesh Open University (BOU) adopted a team approach in developing its formal programs.

Keywords: Developing course materials; Open and distance learning, BOU;

INTRODUCTION

Open and distance learning materials are based on the principles of learning theories to create desirable conditions that will facilitate effective self learning, i.e. knowing the objective, follow the content step by step, involving the students actively in learning. A distance learning (DL) text is designed and written in a modular-format to help home-based students to learn themselves effectively (Brahmawong C.1998). Course materials development process essentially overcomes the four stages: Pre-planning stage, Planning stage, Authoring stage, and Production stage (Dekkers, 1991).

Pre-Planning Stage

The following works are to be done in this stage:

Preparing rough syllabus of the course

Finalization of the syllabus after discussing in workshop and curriculum committee

Approval of academic council

Writers and editors workshop

Preparing of the model module

Writer and editors selection,

Planning Stage

When planning a course for distance education, the following questions are to be considered:

What is the subject matter and content of the course?

What is the aim and objective of the course?

How much time will students need to complete the course (study and assessment)?

Who are the target audience (their levels of education, their employment status?

What other resources will be provided with textbook?

How will the course be assessed?

How long will the course be? (i.e. approximately how many credits)

Authoring Stage

This stage includes the following works:

- Manuscript authoring
- Collecting the manuscript from authors
- Sending the manuscript to referee
- Editing of manuscript
- Obtaining copyright permission

Production Stage

The following works to be done in this stage:

- Word-processing and typeset
- Style editing
- First proof reading
- Team meeting
- Corrections/ illustrations
- Second checking for style and setting
- Second proof reading
- Corrections
- Final check by the author and instructional designer
- Printing

DISTANCE LEARNING TEXT COMPONENTS

A distance learning (DL) text generally contains at least six components: self-pre-test, advance organizer, body of content, activities, feedback and self-post-test with keys (Brahmawong C. 1998). Terms of objectives of distance learning texts aim to help readers to learn by themselves.

The writer is mainly responsible to present the concept clearly. In general topics the traditional texts provide the subject matter without considering the reader's ability to learn by themselves. This is where the text of distance learning differs from that of the traditional one. In terms of content organization, production of a (DL) text begins with content analysis, concept mapping and division of content into a definite pattern, using advance organizers, activities, feedback, self-pre-test and post-test.

Titles of topics and sub topics are clearly highlighted so the readers know all the time where they are and in what direction they are heading for. The size of units, section and lesson in a DL text are consistent with the time. Each unit must contain feedback on the activities assigned to the students so that they can check the result of their work themselves. On the other hand, traditional texts tend to be too 'academic' in their appearance.

Writing a Module

Distance learning courses are organized as a number of linked but discrete modules. Module is called self-sufficient study material. A module is a set of printed learning materials consisting of well planned teaching notes and activities which have been carefully laid out for students to work on independently at their own pace. Modules may be divided into sub-modules, which may take the form of unit/section/chapter and lesson. A module is written and designed in a specific method. The basic characteristics of good modules are that these should be interactive, conversational, self-pacing and pedagogically sound (Parer 1992).

COURSE DEVELOPMENT TEAM

The development of the best quality of instructional text requires input from a number of contributors. (Dekkers, 1994) The following sections describe the roles of each member of course development team.

Coordinator

The major roles of the coordinator are as follows:

- Prepares and communicates course blueprint including the assessment design and plan
- Prepares course development schedule
- Provides team leadership
- Prepares course budget and costing
- Provides training of course team members in conjunction with instructional designer
- Builds and supports course team
- Schedules and plans the team meetings
- Monitors and communicates progress and deadline
- Coordinates with all authors, editors and referee
- Prepare reports to Dean as required

Author

The major roles of the author are as follows:

- Prepares manuscript of new course offered by distance education
- Defines the aims and objectives for the course/unit/ lessons in conjunction with course coordinator/instructional designer
- Ensures that materials are written to an appropriate style for the learners
- Writes assigned module and Radio and TV scripts
- Reviews the course outlines and provides comment/feedback
- Rewrites manuscripts for course already offered by distance education
- Proof reading and checks typeset materials
- Prepares art briefs for illustrators and graphic designers
- Drafts model and subsequent modules
- Designs assessment questions

Instructional Designer

The basic roles of instructional designer are as follows:

- Advises writer on structure, methodologies, appropriate presentation, objectives, activities, review activities, and student evaluative activities etc.
- Defines learning and teaching strategy in consultation with team members/
writers/editors
- Advises writers how to apply distance education principles
- Ensures content, process and outcome are consistent with learning theory
- Advises in designs/preparation of course materials
- Assists in planning and effective sequencing of content
- Assists in the selection of appropriate instructional media
- Researches and defines learner needs characteristics
- Checks quality and quantity of resource materials
- Coordinates the flow of the course material to final proof stage

Content Valuator/Referee

The role of content valuator is to:

- Check content for accuracy, relevance and consistency
- Evaluate resource materials for appropriateness
- Ensure that the unit relates appropriately to the course
- Evaluate the student workload for the course
- Provides academic and critical support to writer at various stage in the course development process
- Provide written or verbal feedback to the writer

Graphic Artist

The basic roles of the graphic artist are as follows:

Defines visual design for course

Creates and arranges graphics and illustrations

Negotiates agreement for course team of design strategy

Ensures effective and consistent visual presentation by monitoring development

The graphic designer prepares the cover design, guides the illustrator to prepare different illustration to make subject matter easy.

Media Specialists

The roles of media specialists are as follows:

Assists and select the place of text book for using audio-video cassettes and Radio TV program

Makes plan for audio/video components in conjunction with course coordinator

Ensure effective media presentation by monitoring development process

Creates arranges for audio /video recordings

Gets agreement from team for development and production strategy

Editor

The major roles of the editor are as follows:

Check activities that their relationship to objectives, appropriate placement, degree of difficulty and do they cover whole module/lesson

Edits original copy for processing and checks accuracy of information

Check spelling and provides advice on editorial style

Advise writers how to improve communication of concepts and ideas

Advise writers on writing style and technical aspects of language

Develops content presentation in accordance with style guide

Check graphics, figures, tables etc. that their usefulness, placement in text

The editor concentrates on whether the writing is user friendly, language is appropriate, identifies the vocabulary and syntax items, which may increase the difficulty of the texts.

BOU EXPERIENCE

Bangladesh Open University was established on October 21, 1992 by an act of the Parliament. BOU is the only national institution providing open and distance learning in Bangladesh has undertaken to conceive and design programs to meet the need. The University has a wide physical infrastructure-based network of 12 regional resource centers, 80 local centers and more than 800 tutorial centers. BOU uses self-instructional print materials; radio and TV broadcasting and limited face-to-face tutorial sessions for delivery of programs. There are six-school which prepare, develop and launch BOU's educational programs. Like in any other Open University, print is the core of medium of instruction in BOU.

Bangladesh Open University has adopted few norms in the course design that are followed in developing course in programs of BOU. A senior faculty member heads a program Team of the University who is assisted by at least three other faculties including one trained in distance education. The team is responsible to the development of the programs for the school. Program Coordinator is the person who is responsible for ultimate designing of the programs (BOU 1992) He/she ensures that the program meets the standard of the University and that the learning strategies adopted in the program is compatible with the structure of BOU.

Programmed Development Team

For development of a course in a program the Program Develop Team (PDT) could be divided into few groups. The respective school for developing each course book forms a course development team. This team comprises course writers, editors, style editor,

graphic designer, illustrator and course coordinator. Two referees also validate the course book.(BOU 1992) To provide a detailed outline on various aspects of the lesson, a writer workshop is organized. The writers are offered a few sample copies of the same course. BOU has also produced a handbook for writing the course book. Each writer generally writes one credit hour course (one credit hour is considered equivalent to 15 lectures of 45 minutes in each) Once the manuscript is fully reviewed and corrected, the course coordinator sends it to the Dean for final approval for publication. The Dean of the School and the coordinator of the PDT will ensure that this has been done properly.

Style Editing

The University uses a style guide in publishing its books and journals. The guide includes styles used in references, spelling abbreviations, punctuation's, quotations and citations. A standard publication guide should also be made available to all writers/editors that specifies page size, layout, fronts, graphic, colour and other related matters for use in all BOU books. Faculty members in the production team will ensure that these standards have been followed. Style is necessary to provide learners with a consistent frame of reference (Hartley 1985) as they interact with the learning materials.

Illustration Plan

A BOU book may have illustrations, pictures that should be included in the publication. Writers/editors normally suggest such a list for the course. Programmed coordinator optimizes these requests subject to available resources, learner's characteristics, program objectives and scope. Printing publication and Distribution division (PPD) unit of BOU will provide help in page set –up, illustrations etc. PPD produce tracing ready copies of the books for the program. Member of the Program Team will be trained in the basics of PPD So that they can monitor the quality of the publication. This division is responsible for the quality printing and timely distribution of all course materials.

The University monitors the performance of the course materials. The learners and the tutors are requested to report the errors and difficulties in the course. The feedback given by the learners and the tutors are analyzed. This way quality of the courses is maintained in the BOU.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Writing is an art and writing for open and distance learning is even more difficult because you need to use certain styles and technique that are so different from traditional writing. In designing and developing distance learning course materials we have to ensure that writers are aware of learning theories and techniques. In fact, without some sort of training the writer cannot develop instructional course materials for distance education. Developing and designing instructional design and course materials for ODL involves more research, commitment, planning and evaluation. Bangladesh Open University should give more emphasis on learning approach regarding its course materials development process. If the course materials development techniques are properly followed and implemented BOU will surely able to produce the best quality of text books for distance learners.

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