



Higher Education Through Distance Learning In Pakistan

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ABSTRACT :

One of the vital purposes of higher education is conducting research and that may be a way that leads a nation to progress. With the advent of advanced technology, predominantly Information Communication Technologies the importance of Distance Education has increased day by day. Many nations have established their ODL universities and developed countries of the world like Australia, UK, USA, Canada boast leading distance universities. The aim of the present study was to identify the opinions of the students who were enrolled at higher education level through distance learning. For this study, the students of M.Phil leading to Ph.D were selected as participants. A questionnaire, consisting 10 items was developed; which determined the view of students about higher education, education through distance and quality of education through distance learning. Each statement of the questionnaire was checked by applying chi square technique, and the respondents confirm that higher education is very important although at the same time it was observed that higher education through distance learning is challenging. The respondents also described that assignments and workshops which are necessary components of distance learning were of much importance for enhancing knowledge and proved very helpful for exam preparation. The study revealed that the learners were well aware of the importance of higher education in the matter of equivalence of distance education with formal education. Distance mode of education in Pakistan is going to be successful and it possesses all the requirements of delivery of effective education.

LITERATURE:

The world finds out new modes of education and now-a-days distance education could be the most popular mode of imparting education. According to Wedemeyer (1983, p.140), education at a distance is teaching learning, the imparting and acquiring of knowledge via methods used because teachers and learner are at a distance by each other by logical extension. Separated teacher and learner communicate by means of some medium or media, regardless of the limitations of space and time, social and economic, among learners, geographical isolation and cultural differences. It appears the

normal traditional school system cannot cope with the large demand. Although distance education is a new term and in it the learner and teacher are far away from each other, it is a form of study, not led by teachers as in formal classrooms but teacher led students who are termed as a 'far away students' and teachers guide them in the proper direction. According to Moore & Kearsley (1996, p.2) "Distance education is planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special method of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organizational and administrative

arrangements.”

Higher education is a vital capital investment and is of significant importance for the development of a country. The responsibility of the institutions of higher education is to train the manpower for future and prepare such persons who can take active part in the progress of the nation. Isani (2005) quotes a World Bank Report, ‘Higher Education: The lesson of experiences (1994)’ in which the importance of higher education is described in these words: Higher Education is of paramount importance for economic and social development. Institutions of higher education have the main responsibility for equipping individuals with advanced knowledge and skills required for positions of responsibility in government, business, and the professions. He further quotes from the same report that the development of higher education is correlated with economic development: enrolment ratios in higher education average 51 % in the countries that belong to the Organization for Economic Development (OECD) compared with 21 % in the middle income countries and 6 % in low income countries. There is a direct link between higher education and economic progress of a nation. Higher education provides opportunities for research and plays an important role in the development of a nation. Universities, for centuries had a crucial role in educating potential professionals, businessmen, political leaders, religious and social scholars who serve the society, enrich its values and develop its resources. (Mustard 1998, p.248).

Romero (2008,p.31) indicates the trend of higher education institutions to distance education mode

One of the biggest trends of the universities in the last century is the establishment and development of the Distance Education System. When this system came into existence in the seventies, it was frequently criticized that it was not a university; that degrees were awarded by post, etc. In

the last world congress held in Sao Paolo in the year 2000, the questioning was along these lines: “Is it possible to say today that a university is real if it does not have a Distance Education System?” In three decades, the concepts have been inverted, naturally aided by the utilization of new computing and telecommunication technologies. So strong is the trend of distance education that it is even said that by the end of the next decade the ‘traditional’ universities as we know them will have disappeared (The Latin American Congress for Open and Distance Higher Education (AIESAD), Cartagena; August, 2001).

The above statement describes the importance of distance education. Advanced countries now pay more and more attention to distance education as at present life is so fast, that it appears very difficult for pupils to attend regular classes. Education is the only way to progress. With the help of education the process of progress is accelerated. Only education enables individuals to play their roles in the progress of the nation.

Distance education was introduced to provide educational opportunities to those who were not in a position to receive education from formal institutions. Through distance education, students of any area of a country may gain benefit from this kind of learning.

Rumbles and Keegan (1982, p.11) describe that:

Distance education is a generic term that includes the range of teaching /learning strategies variously referred to as, ‘correspondence education’ or ‘correspondence study’ in both developed and developing countries; as ‘home study’ or ‘independent study’ in the United States of America’ ‘external studies’ in Australia ‘ tele-ensiegnment’ in France; Fernstudium or Fernunterricht in Germany; ‘Education a Distancia’ or ‘ensenanze a distancia, in Spanish speaking countries and teleducacao’ in Portuguese.

According to APEID, UNESCO (1987, P.5)

“Distance education is term now used to describe a variety of educational programmes and activities. The major common features are that learner and teacher are physically separate but that deliberate efforts are made by education to overcome this separation using a variety of media”

For developed countries, it is very difficult to provide formal education to every individual. Distance education is getting more and more importance. In distance education teacher and learner stay far away from each other but remain in contact with each other through facets of media. Distance education is as effective as formal education. With the passage of time the need for more and more institutions offering distance education is getting importance. At its initial phases there were many doubts about distance education. Now advanced countries are using and imparting education through distance mode. Though teacher and students are not present at the same place in this system, but with planning they remain close to each other.

Holmberg’s (1977, p.9) definition of distance education depicts what is being done by any formal mode of education and it has become more widely accepted. He stated that:

“...distance education covers the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which nevertheless, benefit from the planning guidance and tuition of a tutorial organization.”

Development of a nation depends on research and higher education. Universities are responsible for imparting knowledge and prepare the individuals who bring change in the existing world. Shaikh (1998, p.33) describes the connection between higher education and economic development as:

“In advance countries, universities constitute the main spring of

knowledge, ideas, and innovations. The university’s role as an agent for change is in the area of science and technology. The training of high level scientific manpower is a matter of vital national concern. The development of higher education is thus connected to economic development.”

Higher education is considered as the main source for change. By investing in higher education nations transform themselves into developed nations. Developing countries are making rapid change all over the world with the help of higher education. Developed countries also well aware about the importance of higher education but due to ill policies these nation cannot be in a position to face the changing scenario and are dependent on the developing countries in every walk of life. Qualified manpower is a prerequisite for advancement of knowledge, promotion of research and the socio-economic development the country. The availability of such manpower is possible only through institutions of higher learning well equipped laboratories (Policy Draft, 1998).

The world is changing so rapidly that to walk in line with the times it is required for nations to generate their own sources to meet the basic needs of the people. Higher education is a vital path that leads a nation towards progress and prosperity.

Report of the Commission on National Education (1959, p.18) defines Higher Education as:

“The form of education that exists for the advanced training of young people of serious purpose who have had at least twelve years of previous schooling and are on the verge of adulthood , who have a proven capacity for intellectual work, and who will eventually provide national leadership at various levels and in all sphere.

Higher education provides the best training to fulfill the key posts of administration and prepare such persons who can handle the problems and issues of the country.

Commission on National Education (1959, p.16) stated that the excellence of a country's public administration, the degree of advancement of its agriculture, industry, and commerce, its progress in science and technology, its contribution to the arts of civilization and culture are all measures of the quality of the leaders it produces. The report further states that no country has ever been able to make rapid progress without a well-developed system of higher education. Our greatest national asset lies in the potential skills of our people and our economic and social progress depends on how we develop them.

In Pakistan Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad (AIOU) introduced distance and non-formal education. This University was formally established at Islamabad in June 1974, after passing the people's Open University act by the National Assembly of Pakistan. Education policy (1972-80) document stated as mentioned below:

Open universities are being used in several countries to provide education and training to people who cannot leave their homes and jobs for full-time studies. A people's Open University will therefore be established to provide part-time education facilities through correspondence courses, tutorials, seminars, radio broad-cast and other mass communication media.

Pakistan, with a population of 160.9 million in mid 2008 is the 6th most populated country in the world (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2007-08 p.195). To provide formal education to a such huge mass, is quite a challenge. Government of Pakistan is aware of the importance of education. Keeping this in view, the Government established an Open University that provided education from short courses level to Ph.D level. The main objective of establishment of AIOU was to educate the youth and adults of Pakistan. AIOU offered degree up to PhD level and used a variety of methods to overcome the difficulties which students and teachers faced due to separation.

As in distance education face-to-face (f2f) contact is not compulsory, AIOU used different technologies to facilitate the students and teachers. Main Functions of AIOU described in the report "25 years of AIOU" (p.1) are:

1. To provide educational facilities to people who cannot leave their homes and jobs.
2. To provide such facilities to masses for their educational uplift.
3. To provide facilities for the training of teachers.
4. To make provision for research and development of educational technology and advisory services and to enter into arrangement with other institutions.

At present the AIOU offers different courses and higher level degrees up to Ph.D. Hence keeping in view the case of Allama Iqbal Open University Pakistan it may be claimed with confidence that the University has proved its potential in delivery of education at higher level.

THE STUDY:

The objectives of the study were to find out the view of students about distance education; to identify the opinion of students of distance education about higher education and to find out the role of AIOU in imparting Higher Education through distance mode of education. The population for the study was all the students of M.Phil (Education) leading to Ph.D in 2007 - 2008. A total of 30 (male and female) students of M.Phil (Education) leading to Ph.D were taken as sample. Questionnaire may be termed as a flexible tool that possesses unique advantages over other kinds of tools in collecting both quantitative and qualitative information (Reddy & Nagaraju, 2007). A questionnaire was developed on 5-point scale (Likert Scale) to obtain the view of the student about higher education through distance learning. With the help of chi square the trend of the respondents was checked, and decided whether they are agree or disagree with the statement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Table 1:Opinion about Admission

Statement	SA	A	U N C	DA	S D A	χ^2 p<0 .01
Seeking admission in open university is easier.	5	5	3	12	5	n.s

The above table tells that calculated value of chi square is smaller than tabulated value of chi square; it means the admission in Open University is difficult. It is worth mentioning here that for bachelor and masters degrees which are based on course work, admission criteria is totally different from advance level programmes like M.Phil and Ph.D which are based on research work.

Table 2: Opinion about Cost

Statement	SA	A	U N C	D A	S D A	χ^2 p<0.01
Distance mode of learning is cheaper.	16	5	3	5	1	22.7 df(4)

Table 2 reflects that the calculated value X^2 of is greater than table value, it means that the trend of the respondents is towards the agreement that “Distance mode of learning is cheaper.” It has been internationally accepted by many researches that distance education is more cost effective than formal education.

Table 3 reveals that the calculated value of X^2 at level 0.05 , is smaller than the table value. The respondents disagreed acquiring degree/Higher Education through distance learning is easier than formal system.

As far as credit hours and students intellectual labour is concerned the distance mode of education is not inferior to conventional system.

Table 3: Earning degree

Statement	SA	A	U N C	DA	S D A	χ^2 p<0 .01
Acquiring degree/Higher Education through distance learning is easier than formal system.	2	5	8	10	5	n.s

Table 4: Facilitation

Statement	SA	A	U N C	D A	SDA	χ^2 p<0.01
Distance learning facilitates students	15	7	1	5	2	20.7 df(4)

The above table describes that the calculated value of X^2 is greater than the tabulated value at level 0.05. It indicates that the respondents agreed with the view that “Distance learning facilitates students.” Distance learning being a flexible mode is suitable to many serving and other people from far flung areas.

Table 4 shows that the calculated value (11) of X^2 is greater than the tabulated value (9.488). It means that the given statement “Higher education is important for economic growth” is true. Having been cognizant with the importance of higher education for economic development they got admission in Open University and they felt no difference if the education is obtained either from formal system or distance.

Table 5: Importance of Higher Education

Statement	SA	A	U N C	DA	SDA	χ^2 p< 0.0 1
Higher education is important for economic growth.	12	3	5	8	2	n.s

Table 6: F2F meetings in workshops

Statement	SA	A	U N C	D A	S D A	χ^2 p<0.0 1
Workshops in distance learning provide chances to share knowledge with others and an ideal opportunity of f2f interaction as possible in formal education.	16	5	4	3	2	21.7 df(4)

The above table reveals that the calculated value of X^2 is greater than the tabulated value. It means that the trend of the respondents is towards the agreement i.e. workshops in distance learning provide chances to share knowledge with others and an ideal opportunity of f2f interaction as possible in formal education.

The table 7 reveals that the calculated value of X^2 is less than the tabulated value. It tells that the trend of the respondents deny the statement that behavioral change occurs as good as it is possible through formal education. Since distance learning focuses on learning while

conventional education on teaching. Therefore, the courses of distance learning are designed differently unlike that of formal system. The instructional design of the courses of ODL is totally different and highly interactive. The objectives envisioned in the course design of ODL be measurable and studies so far conducted endorsed such trait of distance education.

Table 7: Behavioural change

Statement	SA	A	U N C	DA	S D A	χ^2 p<0 .01
Students of distance learning get qualification but no behavioral change occurs.	6	5	2	10	7	n.s

Table 8: Lectures delivered during workshops

Statement	S A	A	U N C	D A	S D A	χ^2 p<0.0 1
The lectures delivered by the resource persons during workshops are useful in preparation for summative evaluation.	8	12	3	7	0	n.s

Table 8 shows that the calculated value of X^2 is greater than the tabulated value, means that the respondents confirm the lectures delivered by the resource persons during workshops are useful in preparation for summative evaluation.

Table 9: Programme outcomes to programme objectives

Statement	SA	A	U N C	D A	S D A	χ^2 p<0.0 1
The curriculum of AIOU enables the learners to face the challenges of practical life.	13	6	1	6	4	13 df(4)

The above table predicts that the calculated value of X^2 is greater than the tabulated value. Hence, The curriculum of AIOU enables the learners to face the challenges of practical life.

Table 10: Formative evaluation

Statement	SA	A	U N C	D A	S D A	χ^2 p<0. 01
The task of writing assignments by the students provide help for the preparation of examination.	12	10	3	5	0	16.33 df (3)

The above table reflects that the calculated value of X^2 is greater than that of tabulated value (9.488). It may be inferred that in ODL the component of formative evaluation is also being looked after and not ignored by the system. Formative evaluation is an important activity for effective learning.

DISCUSSION:

Universities play a role like of catalyst which accelerate the process of living and bring changes in every walk of life through research and teaching. Research depends on the knowledge universities disperse. At present, the whole scenario of the world is changing rapidly because of science and technology. These are the universities which generate knowledge that uplifts the standard of nations. For imparting knowledge universities use different modes.

It looks difficult for a country, to educate a nation through formal system. Distance learning is one of the modes used for imparting knowledge and this method is gaining increasing popularity among the people. With the possibility of a 5th generation (m-learning) of distance education, ODL mode is likely to be unbeatable, yet simple.

In Pakistan, AIOU provides opportunities to the entire population, without any boundaries of age and area by virtue of flexi-education. Two decades ago, distance learning was not as popular as it is today, but the reforms of the Government of Pakistan in ICTs has proved to be a blessing for the success of the open university. The study shows that the students of AIOU are well aware of the importance of distance learning. Pakistan being a developing nation, the expenses of higher education are not easily affordable for low income parents. One factor of its popularity is that it is cheaper as compared to formal education. Distance education also provides chances of learning to those who cannot attend the conventional universities due to different problems. The respondents of the study also confirmed that the knowledge they get is as effective as one may get through the formal system. The compulsory components of distance education, i.e. workshops and writing assignments also help students to prepare themselves for the examinations. Quality of learning depends on the knowledge of the teachers,. The respondents agree that resource persons enhance their knowledge.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

The respondents agree that admission at AIOU is not easy. As the importance of distance learning is ever increasing, more and more people are interested in distance learning. A rising number of students seeking admission at higher levels increases the attraction for distance learning.

The respondents agree that distance learning is cheaper. In Pakistan, poverty is a great hurdle in the way of education. Exorbitant fees at conventional universities hamper the quest for higher education. Since distance mode of learning is cheaper therefore a large number of students are interested in getting admission in distance learning.

For acquiring degrees from ODL university, the learner must strive as hard as while receiving a formal education. Distance education facilitates the students. The main characteristics of distance education are to encourage those men and women who cannot leave their homes or jobs yet want to study, but cannot achieve their goals due to mandatory attendance in regular classes. Distance education facilitates them by providing an educational opportunity at their door step.

The respondents agree that higher education plays an important role in the economic growth of a nation. There is a link between higher education and economic growth and consequently economic growth depends on higher education.

The workshops provide opportunities for students to share knowledge with each other. Workshops in distance education are a necessary component of distance education and according to students workshops are the activity during which they interact with each other and interchange their knowledge.

The curriculum of AIOU is according to the needs of the times.

Moreover, if it is designed to meet the desirable/international standards through distance education remains a debatable question. The respondents disagree that through distance learning student cannot get knowledge. What student learns Pakistan where it is a common view that distance education is not as effective as formal education.

The respondents agree that the input of the resource persons during the workshops assist them for undertaking the examination. The basic function of workshops is to guide students in the right direction. Assignments are a compulsory component of distance learning and the main function of these assignments is to enhance learning and prepare and assist the students for the examination.

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