ROLE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN PROMOTING HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The people living in far-flung areas can acquire higher education through distance education. Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) prepares courses for higher education accordingly to fulfill the existing needs of the people. The success of distance learning system depends on the effectiveness of its support services. Distance education is a major vehicle and instrument at all level of higher education. This research identified climate for the acquisition of higher education in the country. So that the higher education may be approachable to those students who are interested to achieve higher education, moreover higher education also important to the development of the country and opens the means of employment for the intellectuals.

Key words: Higher education, distance education, ICT, e-learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is the pioneer in providing non-formal and distance education in the region. University is a unique educational institution with the aim to provide ready access to academic and professional skills to the people of Pakistan and provide educational facilities to those who are living in far-off areas and cannot leave their homes and jobs.

Higher Education today is recognized as a capital investment and is of paramount importance for economic and social development of the country. Institutions of higher education have the responsibility for equipping individuals with advanced knowledge and proficiency required for position of responsibility in Government, business and in other professions. Thus, without the participation of highly qualified manpower, the process of economic development is
difficult to be accelerated. Therefore, it is important that decision-makers must recognize the importance of higher education for the development of country. (Government of Pakistan, 1998) The University offers certificates, diplomas and degrees from basic to doctorate level. AIOU imparts education through distance education system, which provides higher education opportunities to the home bound girls, women and other stratum of the society. The AIOU develops specialized textbooks, cassettes and CDs to enable the students to study on the basis of self-learning. To help them at home, however, the University provides support of radio and television programs. University’s Institute of Educational Technology produces quality educational audio and videocassettes, which enable the students to study at home more effectively.

Revolutionary innovations in the field of Information Communication Technology (ICT) are making the system of Distance Education more effective. As more and more students get access to the personal computers and learn to use the Internet, teaching through Distance Education would become more effective. The university is gearing up to replace the old correspondence method with teaching through Internet. The distance education system denotes the form of study not led by the teachers in the classroom rather than supported by e-tutors videoconferencing. Learner can consult the tutor by using telephone; computer or can meet the tutor for face-to-face interaction and solution of his queries. Learners in workshops discuss their problems with able teachers and get insight about the solution.

Coombs (1973, p.102) warns “formal and non-formal education should be seen as collaborative elements, not antagonistic competitors”. Harbinson (1973, p.10) states “the closer integration of non-formal and formal education may wins the highest returns for human resources development”. In Pakistan, like many other developing countries, Distance Education is considered a complement to formal education. It has rendered great help in alleviating enrollment pressure upon formal education institutions, especially higher education institutions. The programs are offered under its distance system throughout Pakistan and even in some of the Middle Eastern countries with wide choice of courses at a variety of levels for professionals and general public. AIOU extends its educational facilities to the remotest areas, through mailing of learning package and radio and TV broadcast programs and by tutorial services at study centers. Higher Education is recognized as an accepted investment all over the world. Higher Education aims at the intellectual development of the students, shaping them into a responsible/civilized citizen and preparation of trained leadership required for national growth in the highly competitive contemporary world. AIOU is multimedia, multi level, and multi method teaching institution working effectively in different areas and offering educational opportunities to millions of Pakistanis.
AIOU uses a number of varied methodology including seminars/ workshops, correspondences courses, assignments and tutorials, coaching, and regular classes once or twice in a week/months. Radio and TV are extensively used for the teaching of different courses. In some programmes students are supplied with audio and video Cassettes to understand the units in a better way. (Aslam, 2002, p.77) AIOU E-learning platform provides various types of communication opportunities by using learning tools and devices. E-learning allows the learners to learn anywhere/at any time, as properly configured computer or any other tool or device either, CD-ROM-based, network-based, or Internet-based. It may include text, video, audio, animation and virtual environments. Bryn and John (2006), viewed e-learning as an effective form of communication which enables confrontation and exchange of ideas/material for sharing of information. E-learning system comprised synchronous and asynchronous communication. Synchronous communication is real time with tutor and mates while Asynchronous activities use blogs, wikis, and discussion boards e-learning course design also “involves interaction, dialogue, mentoring and coaching” (Oblinger & Hawkin, 2006, p.15).

The concept of Open University has been extended in the United States of America by individual universities as well as the associations of universities. The University without Walls (UWW) is an association of a number of Universities and colleges experimenting with a host of learning experiences such as course work, internship, projects, and independent study without prescribed curricula or strict time schedules for completing their degree programs. The University of Mid-America (UMA) is a major regional experiment in open learning by a consortium of nine universities in the mid-west, (Rashid, 1993, pp.68-70) Radio belongs to the family of mass media, performing two functions simultaneously, as a mass medium it can reach to the wide spread masses, and can communicate information to the individuals in their homes. Hence, “In distance education Radio broadcasts are more sources of knowledge for home based students with direct teaching or as supplementary techniques” (Jumani, 2001, pp.47-48). The Higher Education with various trends of modern media used in education is essential for the country. The Faure Commission (1972, pp.15-17) in its report has dealt with higher education in the context of various trends of modern education. Some of the significant changes highlighted by the said report include the following:

a) Shifting of responsibility from purely private bodies to public authorities.

b) Expansion and diversification of Higher Education multiplicity of disciplines and introduction of interdisciplinary approach.


In epoch of technological change, coping with major changes in the economic, social, and cultural characters of society required creativity and can lead to conflict between new and old institutions and values. And a number of factors, such as, the internationalization of higher education, competition from the private sector institutions, diminishing financial public resources and the greater accountability have brought out the concern of quality of higher education at the forefront of national debate. It is also realized that quality is key element for ensuring accountability and value for money of higher education system. The quality of education in our universities is below international standards and has deteriorated badly, particularly in sciences, mathematics and languages. The system has also not responded to a large number of in-puts made for raising the quality. Some obvious reasons are as under:
a) Level of competence and dedication of the teachers stemming from poor remuneration.
b) Poor standards of student’s intake from the schools and colleges.
c) Outdated curricula.
d) Poor teaching methods and lack of teaching aids.
e) Ill-equipped laboratories and libraries.
f) Lack of discipline amongst students, teachers and subordinate staff. (Isani, 2005, p.232)

Thus higher education in the modern world must provide training to a larger number of students. As the society progresses, the proportion of the people need advanced education increase. The higher education must prepare not only adequate number of persons to fill positions appropriate to modern conditions, but also offer education of quality. There are three tasks, need to be accomplished: The range of educational courses must be extended, larger number of students must be catered for, and the quality of the education provided must be improved. Universities in the Middle Ages – has the two-fold function of teaching and research, which are in turn the complementary activities of the true scholar. Under such a concept the university is primarily a corporation of scholars, of teachers and taught pursuing the common tasks of learning and research.

Higher education in Pakistan is beset with many problems. Higher education institutions have not been able to achieve the purpose of higher education, which is to produce people with moral and intellectual excellence and academic ability to develop logical thinking and can contribute effectively towards the industrial, economic, technological and social development of the country. According to World Bank Report (1992), the most pressing issues of higher education in Pakistan include, among others, is flawed institutional framework, inefficiency and problematic nature of design and delivery of services, irrelevance and wastage of under-funding and low productivity in research. Education is considered as a source of great potential for the socio-economic and cultural development of the country. It is a globally perception that through quality higher education an under-developed nation can be transformed into a developed nation within the lifetime of a single generation.

Rapid expansion of the educational infrastructure necessities, limited financial input and periodic student’s unrest has eroded the teaching/learning process, despite the government efforts to improve the situation; the interface between universities and industries has not taken place. Higher education, which was supply-oriented in past, is showing signs of working on demands of market. The growth of institutions in computing, engineering and business administration is a witness to this development. The charge that universities are neither working on the frontiers of knowledge, nor are they creating hallmark knowledge, of modern university, given the low investment, scarcity of resources and paucity of funds to which this sector has been subjected. The research in universities is weak, inadequately equipped libraries and laboratories continue to hinder the progress of higher education. The system of affiliated colleges is a source of great dissatisfaction. (Shami, & Khawja, 2005, pp.50-51)

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the problems in the use of distance education for promoting higher education

2. Assess use of distance education in Higher Education
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A survey questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents across the country. A total of 100 participants took in the survey. The survey questionnaire developed on a five point rating scale. The responses were weighted accordingly so as to make possible the computation of means. Decisions were based on the mean scores. The mean score for an item was considered significant if found to be 3.5 and above. The parentage was also calculated with mean.

RESULT

Contribution of distance education in promoting higher education in the country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. NO.</th>
<th>ITEM/STATEMENTS</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>DECISION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Level</td>
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<td>S.A (5)</td>
<td>A (4)</td>
<td>UNC (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Tutors are familiar with the comparative perspective of students support services in higher education.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Study guide provides easy access to the required learning material of higher education</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>The printing quality of the allied material of higher education is good</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>The material also indicates the points which needed to be elaborated in the tutorial meetings of higher education</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>The contents of the study guide of higher education are motivational.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>The tutors need training in media support in distance education particularly in multi-media package.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Tutors are trained to deal with different types of distance education.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Regional staff meets the needs of AIOU students at higher education level.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Tutors are trained in use of educational technology for effective communication.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The success of distance learning system depends on the effectiveness of its support services.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DISCUSSION

The analysis of data shows that the tutors play an important role in the system of distance education for promoting higher education in the country. The tutors were familiar with the comparative perspectives of the students support services in higher education. They strongly supported that the study guides, allied material and referred web links provided easy access to the required learning material of higher education. The tutors need training in media support in distance education particularly in multimedia package during the courses of higher education workshops. The majority of the respondents were not agreed that the regional staff meets the needs of AIOU students at higher education level.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of the study, it may be concluded that the tutors play a vital role in distance education system for supporting higher education in the country. The study guides, allied material and referred web links provide instructional material to the students of higher education. The printing quality of allied material of higher education is sound. The students support services like as workshops and tutorial meetings are very essential for higher education through distance education system. The contents of study guide of higher education were motivational. The respondents decided that the majority of the tutors need training in media support in distance education particularly in multimedia package.

It is recommended that the tutors may be trained to deal with different types of distance education. The regional staff may fulfill the needs of AIOU students at higher education level. The tutors may be trained to use educational technology for effective communication. The tutors may need more training in media support in distance education for promoting higher education in the country.
References


