Contribution of Distance Learning in Promoting Tertiary Women Education in Southern Punjab

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Abstract

Pakistan is lacking in providing female education. This gap is fulfilled only by distance education. Allama Iqbal Open University has been providing education through distance and non-formal mode that covers all the areas including remote and for-flung areas where the existence of formal schools/colleges is impossible. The main purpose of this study was to evaluate the role of distance learning particularly among female. The objectives of this study were (a) to review the provision of women education, (b) to explain the contribution of distance learning in promoting female education, (c) to identify their problems and (d) to give suggestions for promotion of female education at tertiary level. Population of the study was all the female students at tertiary level. The study was descriptive in nature and the population of study was consisted of Students and tutors of four districts of Southern Punjab i.e. Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan, Multan and DG Khan. In these four districts 14573 were students whereas tutors were 485. . The sample consisted of 728 students and 97 tutors were randomly selected. Data collected through questionnaire was organized, tabulated, analyzed and interpreted. After analyzing the responses of students and tutors it was found that language used in the material was easy to understand, the material received by the students was complete in all respect, results were normally available on the website whereas tutors do not play the role of counselor and library facilities were not available in most of the study centers. The findings and conclusion of tutors states that university tutors were informed about their appointment on time, study material was also useful for formal students, while tutors were not paid their

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numeration on time and tutors do not give comment on students assignments. So it was recommended that tutors should also act as counselor, library may be made available at study centers, tutors may be paid their numeration on time and tutors may be bound to give comments on students' assignments.

Keywords: Tertiary, Numeration, Population

Introduction

Distance education emerged as an innovation to educate diversity of clients throughout the world. It is an alternate mode of education for those who had no direct access to the formal institutions. Its clients are the deprived people in remote and backward areas of the countries as well as personnel on job, for increasing their technical, professional and academic proficiency. It was started as correspondence education and gradually adopted by a number of American and British institutions as a second mode of education. A number of European and Asian countries introduced it to uplift their education horizontally and vertically (Race, 1986).

With the increasing means of interaction, it gained wide popularity and great prominence by virtue of its distinctive characteristics like flexibility in terms of learning time and space, student's individual learning style and pace, cost-effectiveness and diversity of instructional techniques suitable for the learner's needs and level. Koul, B.N. (1993, p.21) says that "some universities specifically offered distance courses and degrees. Having the capacity of constant modification and evolution, it has not lessened its spell and newness because every new discovery in the means of communication has given it a new dimension". Today it is a popular, effective and the fastest growing field of education.

It gained remarkable acceptance throughout the world and a number of countries practiced it to extract its two fold benefits i.e. extending and enhancing the range of education both horizontally and vertically. A number of educationists discussed and defined distance education in their own ways. The diversity in the definitions shows that this mode of education remained in constant modification, evolution and adaptation of latest means of communications. Following are the definitions, which clarify the nature of distance education: Perraton, H. (1982, p.7) expresses the term distance education as:

…an educational process in which a significant proportion of teaching is conducted by someone in space and/or time from the learner. In practice, distance teaching usually involves a combination of media. The more effective programmes seem to benefit from linking broadcasts and print with some kind of face to face study.

Moore, M.G. (1993, p.664) looks clearer about the nature of distance education as:

Distance teaching may be defined as the family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviors are executed apart from the learning behaviors, including those that in a contiguous situation would be performed in the learners' presence, so that the communication between the teacher and the learner must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical or other devices.

Rumble and Keegan (1982, pp.l3-14) express the main features of distance education as under:

i.   The separation of teacher and learner that distinguishes it from face to face learning.
ii. The influence of an educational organization, which distinguishes it from private study.
iii. The use of technical media, usually print, to unite teacher and learner and carry the educational content of the course.
iv. The provision of two-way communications so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue, which distinguishes it from other uses of educational technology.
v.   The teaching of students as individuals and rarely in groups, with the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialization purposes.
vi. The participation in a more industrialized form of education (based on the view that distance teaching is characterized by division of labor; mechanization; automation; application of organizational principle; scientific control; objectivity of teaching behavior; mass production; concentration and centralization).

Distance education, in contrast to traditional classroom or campus-based education, is characterized by a clear separation in space and time of the majority of teaching and learning activities. Kaye, T. (1989, p.6) says that "Teaching is to a large degree mediated through various technologies (print, audio, video, broadcasting, computers), and learning generally takes place on an individual basis through supported independent study in the students' home or workplace".

The refraction and dimensions of the above definitions does not show any conflict among various schools of thoughts but extend and enhance its scope and range in terms of methods and uses because of its possibilities and varieties are many and fascinating. It has proved a great boon for the providers of education who have adopted it for a variety of reasons. Distance education is promoting education and training in developed and developing countries. It is providing education from primary to tertiary level and in different areas of non-formal education. Countries like Sweden has been using distance education for decade as supplement of formal education to children in scattered home stead where it was not economical to establish a school (Rashid, M. 2010, p.149). The lap of a mother is the first educational institution. So it is the most effective source of progress, prosperity, health and taking behavioral change in a country like Pakistan. According to Rashid, M. (1999, p.18) the women education is very important as it covers half part of the human society. They play a significant role in the development of society and establishing their culture. While Jilanee, B.G. (2004, p.34) stated that "In Pakistan, there are many educational institutions, health services, industries, where educated women have been playing vital role in national development programmes".

In various education policies and plans of Pakistan (2001-05) emphasis was given on female education but fruitful results could not be achieved. The formal system of education could not cope with the demand of women education. Ultimately, the government had to seek alternative approach to formal education. In this regard, Allama Iqbal Open University (Previously Peoples Open University) was established in 1974 with a view to providing education to the public at large. The university considered women education on priority basis. AIOU offered courses from middle level to PhD level for women through its distance learning approach. The present study is undertaken to evaluate the women education through distance learning in Southern Punjab. Distance education integrates the distance learning programme into strategic plans. In this regard Keller, G. (1983, p.75) state that distance learning is a strategic plan routed from the institution and applied to the dispersed individual. Provision of distance education is a critical process for the higher education institutions to implement and expand the distance learning programmes whereas Allen, I.E. and Seaman, J. (2007, p.15) describes that distance learning is a mean to increase students success and attract students in the involvement of education.

Objectives of the Study

The study had the following objectives: (a) to review the provision of women education in Southern Punjab; (b) to explain the contributions of distance learning in promoting women education in Southern Punjab; (c) to identify the problems involved in promoting women education in Southern Punjab and (d) to suggest remedial means to alleviate the problems involved in distance learning in promoting women education in Southern Punjab.

Research Methodology

The study was descriptive in nature and analytical method of assessment using three questionnaires as data collection instrument was used. According to Sax, G. (1979, p.35) "a questionnaire describes currently existing conditions so that these could be modified later on as a research of the researcher". To collect data of the study a survey was made which according to Cohen, L. and Manion, L. (1985, p.34) is the most commonly used method in educational research. In view about nature of a survey Zinser, O. (1984, pp.168-169) stated that survey research consists of conducting an interview in person or by phone or of administering a questionnaire to persons, or through the mail. Population is any group of individuals which have one or more characteristics in common which are of interest to the researcher. The population of the study consisted of the female students of B.A. programme of AIOU of Southern Punjab Region enrolled in Spring /Autumn 2015 semesters. The total female population of the students was 14573. The second population of the study was the tutors of B.A. programme of AIOU in Spring/Autumn 2015 semesters. The total population of tutors was 485. The details of both the population is given in table 1.

Table 1
Population of Students and Tutors

	Student			Tutor		
Name of Regional offices of AIOU	Spring 15	Autumn 15	Total	Spring 15	Autumn 15	Total
Bahawalpur	2199	2248	4447	73	75	148
Rahim yar Khan	524	570	1094	17	19	36
Multan	2334	2614	4948	78	87	165
D.G. Khan	1956	2128	4084	65	71	136
Total	7013	7560	14573	233	252	485

Population of Regional Directors (RDs)/Deputy Regional Directors (DRDs) given in

Table 2
Population of RDs/DRDs

Name of Regional Office	No. of RDs/DRDs
Bahawalpur	2
Rahim Yar Khan	1
Multan	4
D.G. Khan	2
Total	9

Source: AIOU, Research and Evaluation Centre (2015)

Sample

A proportionate sample of the total population was randomly selected from 14573 students of female population. Thus sample of 728 students was selected out of total female population. 728 total populations were selected as a sample among whom 675 responded. The detail along with percentage of three samples given below in

Table 3.3

S.No.	Students	Responded	%	Tutors	Responded	%	RDs/DRDs	Responded	%
1.	728	675	93	97	85	88	9	8	89

Instrument and its Validation

Questionnaires were developed to conduct the survey which according to Vockell, E.L. (1983, p.89) "is a device which enable the respondent to answer questions survey of the related literature was under taken to develop a framework for study". The questionnaire was discussed with the three experts of the field to validate it with respect to content, language and format. The questionnaires for both categories were tested through a pilot study. Fifteen students and five tutors and one DRD of semester Spring/Autumn 2015 of B.A. programme were taken as a sample for the pilot study. The main purpose of this tryout was to know the draw backs, weaknesses of the questionnaires and to minimize the possibilities of ambiguity and misconceptions. Improvement was made in the light of feedback. The questionnaires were finalized by the approval of supervisor.

Data Collection Procedure

The list of the students and their addresses were obtained from Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad. The list of the tutors for second questionnaire was obtained from all the Region of Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan, Multan and D.G. Khan through the courtesy of Regional Directors. The questionnaires were sent through pre-paid mail. Remainders were sent to get maximum sample. Personal contacts were also made where ever possible to receive quick responses particularly from Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan and Multan regions. The data from RDs/DRDs were collected personally. The survey was conducted by the researcher through questionnaires (Appendices, 1, 2, 3) for this purpose. 728 questionnaires for students, 97 to tutors and 9 were given to the sample through personal contact as well as by post. Only the returns of response from students were 675, tutors 85 and RDs and DRDs 8.

Discussion and Conclusions

The language used in the material was easy to understand. Also it is complete in all respect. 92% respondents were agreed with this statement. This statement is correct because Killen, R. (2007,) state that a lot of planning involves in structuring, organizing and sequencing, the content of material so the learner can exposed new ideas easy way.

82 to 86% respondents agreed that system of distance education provide the opportunity to working women learning while earning. Female population is interested to be enrolled in AIOU and study material have sufficient amount of work. In this regard Fergusan, R. M. and Lopez, C (2002, p.1022) state that 1998 to 1999 AIOU offer 204 different courses nearly all subject particularly the Business Administration and Women Education and women desire to improve their lives. Thus the enrollment increased up to 907, 834 students including female. Whereas in other 285 vocational institution the enrolment was only 12,113.

In findings it was cleared that about 70-80% respondents stated that study material written was according to self study pattern, students did not face any difficulty while getting admission in the university, the study material was developed according to the philosophy of distance education and tutors in tutorial workshops were monitored by RD/DRD. The views of Latchem, C, and Lockwood, F (2005, p.74) coincides with the above statements. They stated that the courses were according to

philosophy of distance education. Thus the courses of distance education are also increasing. They quote the examples of such subjects which are being offered in distance education up to postgraduate level are as per philosophy of distance education, Communication technology at distance education and many other subjects which linked to distance education. Whereas only 61.18% respondents agreed that study material arose the interest of students towards their study.

The findings highlighted by tutors indicates that 70-76% respondents agreed that university informed tutors about their appointment well in time, study material received on time, students like study material and consider it interesting, study material was divided into sections and thus easy to understand. Xie, A. and Huang, X. (2012, p.176) emphasis that learning material can be made easy by dividing it into sections and sub-sections. It is the age of technology and the students confused about the information they are provided due to huge volume of learning material, but however if the learning material is divided into different sections it will be easy to understand under the different headings. So it is concluded that the study material of Allama Iqbal Open University is easy to understand.

60-68 % tutors agreed that the appointment of tutors is normally made on merits, study material involve the students into study, ARDs/DRDs initiate admission campaigns in their regions and help students in their administrative difficulties. In this connection Choudry, A. H., Ghaffar, A. A. and Hafeez, M. R. (2008) AIOU regional campuses are made independent like UKOU campuses. In these campuses the students support services are provided for the help and assistance of distance learners. They also help the learners in their administrative problems. For this purpose Open University has established a network of regional centers.

The tutors of AIOU lies in the agreement level of only 22-39% states that ARDs/DRDs monitors the tutorial meeting regularly, tutors are trained enough in tutorial system of distance education, students were punctual in attending the tutorial meeting, tutors give comments on students assignments and students attend the study center regularly. The responses of these statements are very low thus the findings affirm that tutors are not trained in tutoring, they do not give comments on the students' assignments and students do not attend the regular tutorial meetings whereas the RDs and DRDs do not monitor the tutorial meetings.

Findings explored from the views given by RDs/DRDs that 100% respondents were agreed that tutors were appointed on merit, before the

beginning of each semester tutors were briefed about their courses, tutors and students' records were also maintained, and students were helped in their difficulties in selecting the courses. In this regard, Safi, S and Mehmood. T. (2011) state that tutors were appointed by the relevant authority on merit while the students advisory council provide counseling facilities to learners. The 75-88% respondents agreed that study centers were allocated from each group of students well in time, while the arrangement of examination was made with the consultation of controller of examination.

Recommendations

Following are the recommendations:
1. Necessary guidance may be provided by the tutors during tutorial meetings.
2. The tutor may give comments on the students' assignments.
3. The study material may include indication of tutorial support.
4. Tutors may play the role of counselor.
5. Seminar library may be established in the study center
6. Students should be made punctual in attending the tutorial meetings.
7. The tutors may be paid their remuneration on time.
8. RDs may provide AV Aids at study centers.
9. Study material may be sent to students on time.

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