

Allama Iqbal Open University

Unique in terms of distance education

By

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It is an excerpt from an extensive interview of Prof. Dr. Anwar Hussain Siddiqi; given to Mr. Ghaznavi and publisher in daily "Dawn", Karachi — a noted newspaper of Pakistan. For the general information of our distinguished readers, we are reproducing this interview which vividly highlights the role, achievements and future planning of AIOU.

Editor

Allama Iqbal Open University is a unique educational institution in Pakistan as it is operating on distance education system. Vice-Chancellor of Allama Iqbal Open University, Dr. Anwar Hussain Siddiqui, a man of great insight having command over law and economic affairs, obtained Ph.D. degree in Public Administration from USA in 1966. In an interview, Dr. Siddiqui, commenting on the difference of distance and face to face education system, said that majority of the people in Pakistan is still confused about the concept of distance education system. As far as curricula is concerned, it has absolutely no difference over type of education system.

Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), part of the University Grants Commission, was established under an Act of Parliament in 1974. Its degrees, diplomas and certificates have the same equivalence as any other university of Pakistan.

In distance education system the teaching system is decentralised and people are given instructions and guidance preferably where they live or at the nearest place.

This system is suited best to our society for a variety of reasons, as majority of our population still lives in the rural areas and it is difficult for

them to attend the formal educational institutions. Distance education system offers an opportunity to the people to educate themselves in spite of certain cultural barriers. This system also opens the window of opportunities for the working class as it operates in the evening.

Answering a question about the fee structure of the university, Dr. Siddiqui said, "AIOU is essentially a poor man's university and its clientele comprises persons from the lower-middle class, that is why our fee structure is designed to fit the budget of low income groups. We do not charge fee upto intermediate levels and fee structure for the professional institutions operating in public as well as private sectors.

We know that people cannot afford even the existing fee of the university, therefore we have levied a charge of Rs.10/- per student, per course in the university. We have enrolled about one million students in different courses. This enabled us to collect an amount of Rs.10 million this year. We won't let any student leave the university because of financial constraints," he added.

Briefing on the development of the university during the last three years, the Vice-Chancellor said that, by the grace of Almighty Allah the University will be completing its 25 years in November this year. To mark this occasion various activities have been planned.

During these 25 years, AIOU has come a long way from a very humble start and now AIOU has been rated as the largest university in Pakistan and one of the largest and biggest Open University of the world.

"Our annual budget is about Rs.600 million out of which about Rs.90 million is for development. It is worth mentioning that the government is only contributing Rs.85 million annually, so AIOU has attained the status of self sufficiency."

The university in 1997 established an endowment fund with an amount of Rs.150 million. The amount has now increased to Rs. 410 million, out of which Rs.70 million is being spent only on the development.

The university has been completely computerised and all of its regional campuses are linked with each other electronically. "We have provided internet connections to our faculty members. University has plans to start teaching on the internet and very soon our teachers will have their

own web pages and this will revolutionize the entire teaching system," the Vice-Chancellor said, adding the university is sending its faculty members abroad for Ph.D.

"Most of our campuses are operating in rental buildings, therefore we have embarked on an ambitious plan of acquiring land and building our Regional Campuses according to our requirements. We have inaugurated our Multan campus. Campuses of Mirpur AJK, Dera Ismail Khan, Quetta, Sargodha, Faisalabad and Muzzafarabad are in advance stages. This has been made possible by our endowment fund. On the main campus we have constructed a mosque, common facility building. Hostel building project is being finalised," he further added.

Dr. Siddiqui further said that during the last three years, we have introduced 16 post-graduate programmes. Soon we have plans to introduce many Ph.D. programmes.

Talking about the future of the university and the Audio-Video Centre of the university, Dr. Siddiqui said, "we have well equipped Audio/Video centre at the main campus with 55 highly qualified professionals in this section. We are hoping that in coming years we shall be having the license for our own television and radio channel like the Chinese University".