

Teacher Training Through Distance Education in Pakistan

By

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General Introduction

Pakistan is basically agricultural, developing country occupying a crucial and geographical position. Its salient features are as under:

Climate

Climatically, Pakistan offers a great measure of diversity. It contains some of the hottest regions of the world in Jacobabad and Sibi districts, while parts of Balochistan and the Northern mountain areas are characterised by extreme cold. In general, it possesses a dry, continental climate, where rainfall is scanty. The diversity of climates and physical structures makes it possible to cultivate a large variety of crops, so that Pakistan's agricultural economy is diversified and balanced. Rainfall varies from 35 inches in the northern parts of Himalayan sub-mountain region to 1.5 inches over the plains of Punjab and Sindh.

Population

The population of Pakistan during 1996-97 was estimated as 135.9 million of which about 50% are below the age of twenty. The country has experienced high and accelerated population growth rates since independence. The estimated growth rate is 3%. The population of the respective provinces in Punjab 58%, Sindh 22%, N.W.F.P. 17% and Balochistan 3%. The population is thinly scattered over vast areas which have inadequate means of communication. There are also major differences in economic conditions and cultural traditions ranging from the largely cosmopolitan pattern in big cities to that of the nomadic way of life in deserted areas of the South North and mountainous regions in the North and West of Pakistan.

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Language

The people are of a varied racial and ethnic composition and speak about a dozen regional languages. The national language is Urdu and is understood and spoken all over the country. It is also the medium of instruction. Sindhi, Pashto and Balochi are used as medium of instruction in the Provinces of Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan respectively.

Cultural Background

Islam is overwhelmingly the main cultural force as Muslims make up 95% of the population. Pakistan is not only proud of its Islamic heritage, but is also the cradle of an ancient advanced civilization reaching back some 5,000 years when the Indus valley civilization was in existence. Later about 500 BC, the city of Taxila in the north, 30 Kilometers from Islamabad, became a famous centre of Buddhist learning and culture for some thousand years. The north-western area of Pakistan was also the home of Gandhara sculpture.

The Economy of Pakistan

Pakistan is predominantly an agricultural country where 70% of the population live in rural areas and are totally dependent on agro-based occupations. The country is now self-sufficient in consumer goods. Generally the biggest investment is in the oil and gas industry. There are also well established, and large scale heavy industries which include ship building, steel-production, mining chemical fertilizers, machine tools and vegetable cooking oils, etc.

The previous plans have only provided 2.6% of GNP to *education* which was much lower than Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, Singapore, Thailand, Republic of Korea and Malaysia. Considering education as the priority area, the present 8th five-year plan provided 2.3% of GNP to education.

ALLAMA IQBAL OPEN UNIVERSITY

As we know, the open type of University is an institution of continuing education designed for ease of access and extending facilities of formal education to a wider group of people who have missed the initial opportunity, or to whom no such opportunity was offered. In other words, the University opens its doors to anyone who has the capacity to follow its courses under certain procedures.

In Pakistan, the idea of establishing an Open University was first conceived during the discussion which led to the formulation of the Education Policy in 1972. The Education Policy (1972, p.22) stated that:

"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 educational facilities through correspondence courses, tutorials, seminars, workshops, laboratories, television, radio broadcasts, and other mass communication media".

However, the University was established at Islamabad in June 1974 after passing of the People's Open University Act by the National Assembly of Pakistan. In 1977, its name was changed as Allama Iqbal Open University by the president of Pakistan on the name of our national poet Allama Muhammad Iqbal. The University is basically modelled on the line of the UK Open University.

The main objectives of the University are:

- i). To provide facilities for raising the educational standards of the masses who cannot leave their homes and jobs
- ii). To provide facilities for the training of teachers and for instruction in such branches of learning, technology or the vocation as it may deem fit.
- iii). To make provision for research and for the advancement and the appropriate dissemination of knowledge in such manner as it determine
- iv). To hold examinations and to award and confer degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic distinctions to students who have been admitted and have passed its examinations under the prescribed conditions
- v). To extend the time, space, curriculum and resources available in traditional institutions because shortage in the latter makes learning and training difficult on a wider scale.

Structure of Allama Iqbal Open University

The structure of an Open University differs from that of the conventional universities. The system has to incorporate efficient communications machinery to serve the student community spread all over the country. To coordinate such activities, it has been necessary to establish various controlling bodies. Such bodies of Allama Iqbal Open University are:

- (i) The Executive Council
- (ii) The Academic Council
- (iii) The Selection Board
- (iv) The Finance Committee
- (v) The Committee of Courses
- (vi) The Faculty Board
- (vii) The Academic Planning and Development Committee
- (viii) The Committee for Research and Educational Technology

Administrative Structure

The administrative structure of Allama Iqbal Open University consists of Academic Department and Institutes, the Library, Regional Services, Institute of Educational Technology, the Examinations and Servicing Departments, and the offices of administrative Registrar, Treasurer and Project Director. The academic departments were established for individual subjects or groups of subjects. Each department is headed by a Chairman, who plans, organises and supervises the work of the department and is responsible for its work. The main functions of a department is the writing of course units for correspondence courses.

At present, there are four faculties i.e. *Education, Mass Communication, Basic and Applied Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities*. There are twenty-two academic departments, Bureau of University Extension and Special Programmes and other administrative set up as indicated in Appendix-2.

Teaching Learning Process

The Allama Iqbal Open University by its very nature and its educational delivery system, is both an academic institution and production organization. It produces educational materials of specified quality within a given period of time. It is also an academic institution and, in order to be accepted within the rank of academic institution, it assumes a strong academic posture with respect to standards and adopts some of the accepted academic traditions as appropriate. It has a

three-tiered system consisting of Central Headquarters, Regional Offices and Study Centres.

The educational programme of the University is designed to use non-formal methods. Correspondence materials are sent by post to the students. The printed material includes self-assessment questions and special assignments. Radio broadcasts further facilitate the understanding of these lessons. Being more costly and having limited coverage than radio, television has been used only in specified courses like child care Tractor repair and Poultry Farming etc.

At present, there are 32 Regional/Sub Regional Centres and 1022 Study Centres throughout the country. In addition to these, Special Study Centres are also opened for the teacher education courses. The Regional Centres are headed by the Regional Director. They contribute to policy-making, partly through their year-round reporting, and also through their own quarterly conferences held at Islamabad campus. They provide information, advice and feedback about courses, students, local conditions and needs. In many ways the Regional Directors are the *eyes and ears* of the University, which scan the field and feedback information, criticism and suggestions to the University. The students may get help in respect of their enrolment, study difficulties and other problems from the Regional Directors.

The Study Centres which are staffed with part-time employees, facilitate university control over the operation of the university. Tutors at the Study Centres provide guidance to the students and are normally appointed from the staff of the institution in which the Study Centre is located. The Regional Director is the overall in charge of all the centres under his various geographical regions of Pakistan.

Courses at Allama Iqbal Open University

The University offers courses in four broad areas: (i) Teacher Education (ii) Functional Education (iii) General Education, and (iv) Research and Development. Some of the courses are non-credit courses, others ranging from Women Matric level to Ph.D level in the field of Education, Islamiyat, Iqbaliat and Urdu. At present, there are 215 courses of different levels being offered by the Allama Iqbal Open University in order to cater the needs of thousands of students of the country. Not only the students of Allama Iqbal Open University use the learning packages which include print materials, audio-video lessons with detailed study guides, but students of formal system are benefitting extensively from these also.

Medium of Instruction

English and national language Urdu are usually the languages of instruction. Only a few courses are in Sindhi and Pashto for the provinces of Sindh and North West frontier Province.

Admission System

The Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has Semester bound System. There are two semesters in a year starting from April to September and October to March. All the courses are advertised in the national newspapers well in advance so that the students may get admission in their choice of study. The students are also informed through the advertisement to get help from the Regional Directors in case of any difficulty in selecting courses, getting admission forms and other information. The admission forms are received on or before the specified date. After receiving the admission forms by the Admission Office, the Computer Centre prepares enrolment lists and mailing address labels. Fee receipts are finally checked by the Director (Admission) and admission is finalized after observing the required criteria.

Study System

After enrolling the students, the study materials alongwith assignments, students guide, schedule for Radio/T.V. programmes and the tutorials are mailed to them.

Assessment

There are four home assignments in each full credit course and two assignments in each half credit course. A student can take two full credits in one semester. It is compulsory to complete all the assignments on the specified dates failing which the student has to repeat the course. The marks distribution to complete the course is as under;

1. Continuous assessment = 40%
2. Final examination = 60%

Feedback

There exists a system of feedback from the students in the light of which the course books continue to be improved. In this regard the research activities are

carried out by the University's Research and Evaluation Centre. The centre conducts research studies not only at the request of various academic departments but some times at its own initiative. Results of such studies, concerning the effectiveness of courses in terms of their educational impact on students are normally communicated to the course team for revision purpose.

Moreover, the comments received direct from the students and the general public also help in the improvement of the courses.

Teacher Education through Distance Education

The demand for education has been increased drastically. With this increasing demand, there was need of trained manpower. Formal teacher education institutions in the country do not cope with such a big need so it was considered necessary that Allama Iqbal Open University should provide training to the pupil-teachers through its distance education approach.

The AIOU started teacher training programme in 1975. The first programme launched was the in-service. Later on PTC, CT, B.Ed programme were launched. The year wise enrollment from 1985 to 1995 is given in Table-1.

Table 1. Yearwise Enrollment of teacher training programme from 1985-86 to 1995-96

Year	Programme Title				
	PTOC	PTC	CT	B.Ed.	M.Ed.
1985-86	3338	19556	1950	-	-
1986-87	-	10125	1587	-	-
1987-88	-	6674	1766	4164	45
1988-89	-	9883	2731	7423	-
1989-90	-	10681	1094	2902	-
1990-91	-	5365	1601	10747	40
1991-92	-	15232	3767	21258	193

1992-93	4860	13641	5189	17160	82
1993-94	7247	58619	20692	10778	343
1994-95	7075	72432	27349	21810	524
1995-96	9740	70915	26640	24487	583
TOTAL	32260	293123	93970	118729	1810

Sources: A.I.O.U. Research & Evaluation Centre.

Primary Teacher Orientation Course through Distance Education

In the last three decades, there has been increasing interest paid to the provision of inservice training for the teaching profession. This interest is perhaps more evident in the developed countries, such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America, where according to Harris (1969, P.84) education authorities are becoming increasingly aware of:

- * The inadequacy of the pre-service education of teachers;
- * The short time span of professional and academic practices knowledge in a rapidly changing social and educational climate;
- * The need for coordination and articulation of instructional practices; and
- * The need for teachers to maintain contact through closer interaction.

In Pakistan with the introduction of a modernized primary school curriculum in 1980, some 150,000 working primary school teachers needed to be familiarised with the new content and methods introduced into the curriculum and all needed in-service training, the formal system being inadequate to meet the demand for retraining on such a wide scale. In view of the limited institutional facilities for such in-service training, the Allama Iqbal Open University was entrusted to offer a course for the re-training of these teachers in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Provincial Education Authorities.

There were three main objectives of the in-service course. Firstly, to familiarize primary teachers with the new elements of the revised primary school curriculum. Secondly, to increase their knowledge in the appropriate subject areas

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There were three main objectives of the in-service course. Firstly, to familiarize primary teachers with the new elements of the revised primary school curriculum. Secondly, to increase their knowledge in the appropriate subject areas

and help them develop their teaching skills. Thirdly, to provide them with an opportunity in terms of improving their qualifications by counting the primary teacher orientation course (PTOC) as one course credit for the Intermediate Certificate.

However, the Primary Teacher Orientation Course is a six month programme. It was initiated in 1976-77 and was conducted in cycles through the non-formal methods of using correspondence courses, face-to face tutorials, workshops, laboratories, radio broadcasts and the use of other mass communication media. The University had developed this programme of distance teaching in the specific areas relevant to the primary level and in keeping with the latest syllabuses. The content of the course include Urdu, Health and Physical Education, Arts and Crafts, Adult Education, Evaluation, Mathematics, Science, Islamiyat, Social Science and Population Education.

The course was divided into ten content areas. Each area is dealt with through a number of study units. A unit is one week's study material including self-assessment questions, radio broadcasts and written assignments. All the written material in each subject area consists of unit lessons, each being a self-explanatory exposition in which the theme has been developed in simple and informal language. Lessons have been set in a format that makes them distinctive from the textbook commonly used in formal education. There are 18 radio programmes of 15 minutes duration spread throughout the course which elucidate and expand key concepts and other elements of the written material. Each one of the 18 radio programmes is repeated once in the same week.

Course assessment takes the form of 4 written assignments during the course. These are marked and commented upon by the students' tutor and the three best grades count for the final assessment. The examination is held at the end of the course at examination centre according to the location and distribution of students. The overall grades for continuous assessment and for the examination are combined to produce a final course result for each student. The course assessment consists of: Continuous assessment = 40%, End of course examination = 60%.

Tutor-student contact is arranged throughout the course. Normally 20-25 students are allotted to a tutor. The tuition is of two kinds. Firstly through the comments and suggestions made by the tutor on student assignments. Secondly, by means of a programme of tutorials at which student groups can meet their tutor and receive help with any study difficulties.

The capital cost of the course were estimated in 1977 as Rupees 25,327,000/=. The capital cost was for 150,000/- primary school teachers. The average unit cost, therefore, is worked out as Rupees 160/- (Equivalent to US\$ 6/-). Whereas Rs.120/- is the estimated cost for providing in-service training to teacher for a full-time course of about 6 weeks using conventional teaching methods. Moreover, in compliance with the decision of the fourth Education Minister's meeting, the course is being provided free of all costs including tuition fee, cost of books and examination fee.

Problems involved in teacher training programmes

The University has to experience some problems in imparting teacher training programme through distance education. These problems include:

1. **Availability of trained personnel**

In order to provide tutorial and practical component, the university has difficulty of getting trained personnel to fulfill the spirit of distance education system. In some areas of Pakistan particularly at Post Graduate level programme i.e. B.Ed. and M.Ed.

2. **Monitoring of practical component**

Due to heavy enrollment in teacher training programmes, the University faces difficulty in monitoring the teaching practice, workshops and research work.

3. **Centralization of the programmes**

All the teacher training programmes are centralized at main Campus Islamabad. Sometimes the students have to contact head office even for small matters such as issuance of enrollment number, examination roll number slips, assignments questions paper, supply of instructional materials and changes of address etc.

4. **Provision of counselling and guidance**

No one can deny the significance of immediate counselling and guidance in education. Whereas in the Distance Education system, the provision of counselling and guidance is all the more necessary. However, this aspect is not fully covered by A.I.O.U. especially in the regions.

5. **Media support**

The distance education approach is strengthened by the use of media such as TV, Radio, A.V.aids, telephone conferencing, video conferencing and E.Mail etc. However, all such components are fully used in teacher education courses except Radio and TV programme to supplement the written material. Being limited coverage and more expensive the use of TV is restricted to certain courses only.

6. **Postal services**

Postal services are not reliable in far flung areas of Pakistan. Sometimes the students get information late e.g. Roll number slips receive after specified date of examination.

7. **Tutor training**

The distance tutor lacks proper training to work in the system of distance education. Before starting of the course, there is need to brief the tutors on how to tutor.

8. **Provision of reference materials in the regional offices**

There is need to provide reference study materials in all the regional offices of AIOU so that the students can be more benefitted.

9. **Possibilities**

It is evident from the enrollment in various teacher education programme of AIOU that a wide scale clientele is interested to have or increase qualification in teacher education. The University is providing limited seats to the potential students. Whereas, if sources permit, the restriction on enrollment can be avoided. This will facilitate the public at large to satisfy their urge of becoming trained teachers.

Conclusion

Distance education is becoming more and more effective and accepted mode of imparting education globally. Its credibility is increasing in Pakistan in which it is sharing a major position of teacher's training requirements. Its cost effectiveness is also acknowledged and confirmed by all concerned planners and educationists. The future of Distance Education is very bright generally in developing countries and specially in Pakistan.