

Twenty Five Years of Allama Iqbal Open University

By

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The Allama Iqbal Open University was established in June, 1974 with the main objectives of providing educational opportunities to the masses and to those who cannot leave their homes and jobs. In the last 25 years, the University has *more than* fulfilled this promise. It has opened up educational opportunities for the working people and has provided access to the females at their doorsteps. It has also done pioneering work in the field of Mass Education. It is now breaking new grounds in the fields of professional, scientific, and technical education. It is attempting to reach out to the remotest areas of Pakistan. It is also attempting to harness modern Information Technology for spreading education in Pakistan.

The idea of *Distance Education* was first mooted in UK in late 60's by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Wilson. He was of the view that educational opportunities must be provided to those who might have missed better education due to early employment and wish to upgrade their knowledge and skills in their spare times in the evenings at home. The UK Open University was thus established in 1969. Since then, it has become a major institution of learning in UK and has opened up opportunities for millions of working people. The gospel of Distance And Open Learning has, since then spread throughout the world. More than sixty open universities are operating around the world on the basis of distance education. Modern Information Technology has made the task of distance education, much more easier and effective.

The AIOU, when established in 1974, was the *Second Open University* in the world and the first in Asia and Africa. Thus, it speaks of the foresight of the policy makers at the time. As the last 25 years of AIOU have proved, distance education has opened up new opportunities for millions, particularly women, and supplemented the efforts of the Federal

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and Provincial governments in a big way and without becoming a burden on their resources.

The idea of distance education assumed greater relevance and acceptance in Pakistan due to the factors of poverty and relative deprivation of women. The rate of literacy, incidence of drop-outs, and excess to higher education is much lower in the poorer classes of Pakistan. The incidence of poverty is much higher in the rural areas, where formal education is much less established. The rate of literacy and education is much lower for females in Pakistan, particularly in the rural areas, due to poverty and conservative traditions. Many conservative parents, under the pressure of old age traditions, do not allow their daughters to go out to the formal schools. The AIOU, through its system of *Distance Education*, has thus provided educational opportunities to these *homebound* girls and women. This explains the reasons why the majority of the students enrolled with This University are females.

Of recent, the University is trying to fulfil another current need. Professional and technical education in Pakistan is becoming very costly, specially in recent years, because of Government's policy to encourage private sector in these fields. The lower middle class and poorer classes are being marginalized and their children have very little chance to get higher education in fields like Business Administration, Computer Science, Medicine and Engineering. The AIOU is attempting to meet this challenge and to keep a window open for these classes by keeping the costs at the minimum and by creating a Students Assistance Fund.

Teaching Methodology

The difference between the traditional formal system of education and open distance system of education lies essentially in the *Teaching Methodology*. As far as the curriculum is concerned, it is more or less the same. The University is part of the UGC system and abides by the mutually agreed curricula. The difference essentially lies in terms of teaching methodology and for reaching out to the people in the far flung areas of the country, and even at their doorsteps. The University employs non-formal method of Correspondence, Radio and Television broadcasts, special textbooks and reading materials prepared on self-learning basis, part-time teachers (tutors) engaged nearest to the students, a system of Study Centres for applied training spread out throughout Pakistan.

i. Study Centres and Information Technology

The concept of Study Centres was first employed in the University for teaching practice in its educational programmes. Students enrolled in its PTC, CT and B.Ed programmes were given teaching practice in the selected schools, designated as the Study Centres. Of late the concept of Study Centres for applied and practical training has been used extensively for professional and technical; for example, Business Administration, Computer Science and Information Technology.

ii. Radio and TV Programmes

The traditional method of teaching through correspondence and providing guidance through tutors was gradually supplemented by Radio and Television Programmes. The development of IET and its technical competence has made it possible for the University to produce of high quality, the audio and video programmes; which are regularly broadcast on Radio and Television, and are also sent to the students in the form of Audio and Video cassettes. The University is presently allowed one hour every day on PTV-2 which is not sufficient for providing meaningful support in the large number of degrees and diplomas offered by AIOU.

iii. Latest development in the Communication and Information Technology

The latest development in the Communication and Information Technology, particularly the Satellite and the Internet, has revolutionized the system of *Distance Education*. Satellite and Internet are being extensively used as a medium of instructions as well as a source of information. As we harness this technology for distance education, the traditional correspondence method and tutorial systems may be replaced by distance teaching through the Satellite and Internet.

Current emphasis in AIOU's Academic Programme

For the last two years or so, the University is trying to fill the gaps in its Graduate and Post Graduate Programmes and make a major thrust in the field of professional, scientific and technological programmes. Previously, the University was only offering the Intermediate (Arts) Program; now the Intermediate (Science) has also been launched. BBA and MBA were offered through distance education with correspondence method only, resulting drop-outs in large number, BBA (Hons) and MBA Programmes have now been launched with the provision of Study Centres, throughout Pakistan and with ready guidance available to the students in professional subjects. The University had started M.Phil Programmes in Urdu, Islamic Studies and Iqbaliat, but there were no M.A. Degree offered in these subjects. Now the University has launched MA Islamiyat and M.A. Urdu Programmes. In the field of education, there was no M.Ed. Programme. Although its B.Ed. programme was very popular. The M.Ed. Degree programme was launched in 1998 with tremendous success. The University receives more than 30000 applications in every offering and can only cope with about 3000 with great difficulties. The B.Sc. Computer Science was launched in 1997, keeping in view the national as well as international demand. With the help of about 60 Study Centres throughout the country, it has been a tremendous success, and almost 1500 students are getting standard quality training at very low cost.

Faculty of Islamic Studies

The Faculty of Islamic Studies has been separated from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities where it was not getting sufficient attention and resources. The Faculty has been divided into Departments of Quran and Tafseer, Hadith and Seerah, Fiqah and Islamic Law, Islamic Thought, Culture and History, Arabic and Muslim Ummah in the Modern World. Efforts are being made to recruit qualified staff for these departments.

The Faculty is already offering M.Phil in Islamic Studies and teachers training programme in Arabic Teacher Training Course. The standard of its M.Phil Programme is already well recognized. The University has now started an M.A. Islamic Studies with a difference unlike other universities. Our degree will emphasize in-depth knowledge of

Arabic and specialization in one of the six areas in the second year of study.

Dars-e-Nizami

In the last 50 years or so, many attempts were made at improving the study of *Deeni Madaris* and integrating them into the main stream of the educational system, without any success. The University has however, been able to muster considerable support from religious scholars and has convinced them that their syllable should also include modern language, social sciences, mathematics, etc. to enable their graduates to find jobs and to get assignments abroad in Mosque and Islamic Centres. The University Dars-e-Nizami Program, launched in 1998, has been well conceived and we plan to consolidate and expand it further.

The University has considerable experience in teaching of Arabic specially through the use of Television. Al Lisan-ul-Arabi, the first successful programme on Television was launched by the University in its early days. The Government is presently emphasizing of teaching Quran with meanings at the school level. The University plans to restart the Arabic programme on the Television with much improvements. Whereas its present programme for training of Arabic Teacher is highly successful, we are hoping to launch a Master's Degree Programme in Arabic also.

Iqbal Studies

The University is named after the great poet, philosopher and thinker, Allama Muhammad Iqbal. His poetry and thoughts had not only inspired the Pakistan movement, but are also a beacon of light for the Muslims for all times. The University has, therefore, established a specialized department of Iqbal Studies, which has contributed greatly to research, publications, and teaching in the field of *Iqbaliyat*. The M.Phil degree, being awarded in this field by the University, is well recognized. The University has recently started a Ph.D. programme in Iqbal Studies also.

Short Term Educational Programmes (STEP)

In addition to certificates, diplomas and degrees, the University has also started Short Term Educational Programmes for the benefit of those who wish to take up only one course and not necessarily work for diploma

or degree. We are offering many useful programmes of public interest including Computer Literacy under this scheme.

Regional Campuses

The University has established 32 Regional Campuses in various parts of the country to coordinate and facilitate decentralized system of education of the University. The Regional Directors keep a roster of qualified teachers and experts in each field of Study in their area and enlist them as the University's Part-time Tutors. Each group of students is entrusted to a tutor for guidance. Assignments written by the students are evaluated by the tutors and returned to them, with their comments. The Regional Campuses also arrange practical training, teaching practice, workshops and seminars and facilitate holding of examinations in their own areas. The University is adding four more Campuses in Baluchistan to increase its out-reach in the vast Province.

Historical perspective

In the first five years, the University started Basic and Functional Programmes. In the late 70s or early 80s the University started General Education Programmes like Matric, Intermediate (Arts) and B.A. etc. The Mass Education Programme were also started in April, 1980. In the late 1980, B.Ed. and some Post Graduate Degree programme were started. The early 1990, was the year of opening up of our Teaching Education Programmes, like PTC, CT and B.Ed. by relaxing the admission requirements, resulting in tremendous upsurge in the enrolment. The period from 1997 to 1998 marks the expansion in Post Graduate Programmes in general and professional, scientific and technical programmes in particular.

Vice-Chancellors

The University was blessed with a number of outstanding Vice-Chancellors to guide it towards attaining its objectives. The University started its operations under the leadership of Prof. Abdul Hashim Khan in 1974 in a rented building. His tenure was, however, very short. In a real sense, Dr. W.M. Zaki was the first Vice-Chancellor of the University. He laid down the foundation, defined its objectives, outlined its teaching methodology and laid down the regional and field organizations, with the help of experts from UK Open University. He was followed by Dr. S. M.

Zaman (presently Chairman, Council of Islamic Ideology), Prof. M. Mohiuddin and Dr. G.A. Allana. The tenure of Dr. G.A. Allana was a period of expansion in its operations and regional network. After Dr. G.A. Allana, Dr. W.M. Zaki, came back again to guide the affairs of the University. He was followed by Dr. Muhammad Tariq Siddiqui (presently Vice-Chancellor, Quaid-i-Azam University). Although his tenure was short, he consolidated and streamlined the admissions and examinations system of the University and opened up opportunities for a large number of teachers by relaxing admission requirements in PTC, CT and B.Ed., etc. His period saw a great upsurge in the course enrolment. Dr. Muhammad Tariq Siddiqui was followed by Prof. Javaid Iqbal Syed, who was Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University. He was first to perceive the need for starting courses in Computer Science. He also started the programme of Short Terms Courses (STEPS). The present Vice-Chancellor joined the University in February 1997 with eleven years experience at the International Islamic University as its Vice President and long experience in administrative training institutions like National Institute of Public Administration, Karachi, Pakistan Administrative Science College, Lahore and Federal Judicial Academy, Islamabad.

Overseas sponsorship

The University was established with the technical assistance of the UK Open University. The ODA Project continued for almost twenty years from 1976 to 1994. The ODA helped not only in academic development, but also provided assistance for the setting up of the Institute of Educational Technology (IET), University's Press and the Data Processing Centre. Academic programmes were assisted through the Integrated Functional Literacy Project (IFLP), Functional Education Program for Rural Area (FEPR), and Basic Functional Educational Program (BEFP).

Several other countries, for example, the Government of Netherlands, helped the University in the Matric Women Project under which several pilot projects were launched throughout Pakistan, reading materials were developed and Matric Women Programme was launched, which has now been extended to the males. The Government of Norway funded the New Primary Teachers Orientation Course (New PTOC), for the training of primary teachers. The Programme continued for ten years and was a tremendous success.

The Government of Japan (JICA) helped the University in modernizing and updating the Studios and equipment of the Institute of Educational Technology. We are now negotiating with the JICA to start the second phase of this Project by giving us the latest digital technology for producing high quality educational films.

By now, all the foreign aided projects have dried up. The University is attempting to secure assistance through the Social Action Programme.

Enrolment Trends

The University had made very humble start with only a few functional courses in 1976. The number of Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees increased to 17 by 1989 with a course enrolment of 1,90,446. The enrolment has jumped to 9,07,834, and the number of Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees increased to 255 in 1998-99. The significant increase in course enrolment at the University is explained by introduction of a number of professional and post graduate programmes in the last two years including B.Sc. in Computer Science, BBA and MBA (with Study Centres), M.Ed. M.A. Education, M.Sc. Physics and Dars-e-Nizami. The enrolment is likely to increase even further with the launching of many popular programmes like LLB and B. Tech in the near future.

The University has so far issued 409,293 certificates, diplomas and degrees in different disciplines.

International Awards

In recognition of its pioneering work in the field of non-formal and basic education, the University has received two International Awards from Unesco i.e; *NOMA Award* and the *Raja Roy Singh Award*.

Budget and Finance

The University had started with a modest budget and was heavily dependent upon the Government and foreign assistance for its programmes. With the expansion in its activities and diversification of its programme, the situation has tremendously changed over the years. The University is now meeting almost 86% of its current and development needs from its own resources and the Government grant is only about

14%. The University budget stood at Rs.2.83 million in the first year of its establishment in 1974-75 which was entirely a Government grant.

The budget of the University increased to Rs.210 million in 1996-97 with the Government grant contributing about 31.2% of the total budget. In the current year (1999-2000), the University budget stands at Rs.610 million with Government grant contributing only 14% of the budget (Rs.85 million). The University is thus fast moving towards total self-sufficiency, and its budget is fully balanced.

Endowment Fund

The University gathered its savings lying idle in various accounts and started an *Endowment Fund* as per the AIOU Act and Government Policy, in 1997 with an initial capital of Rs.150 million. The capital in the Endowment Fund has reached within three years to Rs.418 million. The capital is invested in the Government Savings Schemes. The income from these investments has been ear-marked only for the development programmes of the University, by the Executive Council.

Development Activities

The University has embarked upon a development programme with the help of income generated by the *Endowment Fund*. The development projects includes essential academic and non-academic buildings, including three academic blocks on the Main Campus, a mosque and a clinic which are nearing completion. A hostel for 160 post graduate students and expansion in the University Press Building are under execution.

Of all the 32 Regional Campuses of the university, only the Lahore Campus is operating from its own building. The other Campuses were operating from rented houses, which are not conducive for academic activities nor do they provide any facility to the students. The University has therefore, started acquiring land for its Regional Campuses and constructing the campuses as per the academic requirements. The Campus at Multan has been completed and was inaugurated by the worthy President of Pakistan on July 10, 1999. The construction work at the Regional Campuses of Mirpur (AJK) and D.I. Khan has started. Tenders for the Regional Campuses for Quetta and Karachi have been called. Land has been acquired at several other places including

Sargodha. The new campuses buildings provide for spacious Auditorium for students activities, Library, Computer Centre and Examination Halls, etc.

Computerization

Computerization of the University's Data Processing System linking the regions with the Main Campus through E-mail/Internet, providing internet facilities in the University Library on the Main Campus as well as the Regions. Training of teachers and Staff has been started. Almost 300 PCs have been inducted into the system. This has facilitated data processing of almost a million course enrolment in admissions, examinations and mailings, etc. This has also facilitated the students in terms of redressal of their complaints and free flow of information with respect to Admission and Examination, etc.

Our ultimate aim is to replace the traditional correspondence method with the Internet. As our teachers get trained in the use of Computers and Internet, the system of Distance Education will make a quantum jump.

Faculty Development

A major component of the development programme of the University relates to Faculty Development. Substantial allocations have been made from the Endowment Fund for development of the Faculty in Pakistan and abroad. Two teachers have been sent abroad for Ph.D, and several others have been given assistance for pursuing their Ph.D's in local Universities. As the expenditure on buildings declines gradually, the allocations for Faculty Development and academic programme will increase.

Television and Radio Programme

The Institute of Educational Technology (IET) has produced 445 Television Programmes and 2345 Radio Programmes. The number is likely to increase if secure more time on PTV-2 or get our own license.

Students Assistance Fund

The University has levied a charge of Rs.10/- per student course which is generating almost Rs.10 million per annum. This amount is being collected from all the students but is ear-marked for assistance to only deserving students particularly in the relatively costly courses in Computer Science, Business Administration and Physics, etc.

FUTURE PLANS

Academic Programmes

The University is working for launching of additional Graduate and Post Graduate Programmes in the field of Natural Sciences. Law, Computer Science and Islamic Sciences. Ph.D. Programmes would be developed in several disciplines to overcome the shortage of researchers and teachers.

Educational Television

We have the technology and the expertise to run the Educational Television on our own. More than 50 Engineers and Producers from the IET have been trained in UK and Japan. Our Studios are well equipped with latest technology with the help of the Government of Japan (JICA). Unfortunately, the Educational Television (PTV-2) started with the help of the Government of Japan could not be fully utilized for the purpose it was established. In the prime time, this channel is also being used for entertainment purposes. The AIOU is allotted only one hour at odd hours, in the afternoon. We have, therefore, decided to apply for a license to start a Radio and Television Station of our own or to request the Government to hand over the Educational Television to the University.

Teaching through satellite

Presently teaching through satellite is very costly. As soon as Pakistan launches satellite of its own, we will begin our educational programmes through it and try to reach out all corners of the country through this medium.

Teaching through Internet

As soon as our teachers are well trained in the use of Internet for teaching purposes, and the access to internet is enlarged by reduction in costs of PCs and internet connections at home, we plan to gradually shift from correspondence method and the tutorial system to the system of Distance Education through internet. We are hoping to develop a Wide Area Network throughout Pakistan, to develop and to launch our own Website for starting our educational programmes through the internet.

Science and Technology – Agreement with Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission

In the last 20 years or so, the University lagged behind in the field of Science and Technology on the assumption that it is not possible for AIOU to arrange practical and applied training in these fields. The difficulty has now been overcome with the assistance of sister institution and the private sector.

A break-through has been made with the signing of an agreement with the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission wherein the experts from the Commission will assist the University in the development of standard textbooks and reading materials, in teaching and most importantly in the provision of practical training in their well equipped laboratories and workshops. M.Sc. in Physics has already been launched. M.Phil in Physics is likely to be launched in the next semester and we are preparing the programme of M.Sc. Chemistry. We are also discussing with the Pakistan Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (PCSIR), and will hopefully sign a similar agreement with them which will open up avenues for launching meaningful programmes in the field of science and technology all over Pakistan by using their experts and their laboratories spread over the whole country.

The Agricultural Department of the University is working on several Master's Programmes including Agricultural Extension, Forestry and Animal Husbandry. The Master's Programme in Animal Husbandry is being launched from the next semester.

Graduate and Post Graduate Programmes in the field of Engineering and Technology in the near future.

The University has also made a beginning in the field of Medicine. It has launched Post graduate diplomas in Eye Care, Nutrition and Dietetics with the help of experts and recognized hospitals around the country. We hope to launch the degree programmes also in the near future.

The advent of Internet has opened many avenues and vistas for launching many programmes in the field of Science, Technology and Medicine and we will offer relevant subjects with the help of Internet.

Epilogue

The AIOU, in the last 25 years has come of age, and has fulfilled its promise. It has proven to be a most cost effective method of spreading Mass Education in the country. It is supplementing the efforts of the Federal and Provincial governments in the field of education without putting a burden on their resources. It has provided educational opportunities to women and working people. It has opened a window for the less privileged classes.

The system of *Distance Education* has great potential for further expansion and growth. The University can contribute immensely in the field of literacy and primary and secondary education. It can take on the entire or at least a part of the responsibility of the Mass Literacy Programme with its vast regional network already on the ground. The next 25 years will *Inshallah* see the Allama Iqbal Open University growing into an even better and larger institution of learning in Pakistan.