

Quality of Teacher Education Program of Distance Mode

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Abstract

Education is considered the best investment for national development through the development of human. For this development formal and distance education systems are contributing equally. In Pakistan Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is playing significant role to provide the education facilities at large scale for all levels through distance mode. Particularly teacher education program of AIOU is the largest one to offer the educational opportunities to the teachers of all levels. Currently this study was intended to explore the quality of teacher prepared by AIOU. While focusing the quality indicators related to teacher education program these objectives were addressed. (1) To examine the quality of different components of teachers education offered by AIOU. (2) To examine the significant role of AIOU in providing teacher education (3) to explore the factors affecting the quality of teacher education program of AIOU (4) to give suggestions for improving the quality of teacher education program. This was descriptive study, sample of study comprised on 200 students and 50 tutors of M.Ed/M.A education. For data collection questionnaire on three point scale were developed and administered among the sample. Through percentage data was analyzed. Majority of the respondents opinioned that quality of curriculum, delivery mechanism, evaluation system and students support services

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was not satisfactory. Hence workshop component is effective for enhancing the knowledge and professional skills of students. Correspondence mechanism of university is not effective. On the basis of the findings, revision of courses, strengthen the students support service while addressing their program related queries, improving assessment system and feedback of tutors on assignments may be ensured.

Keywords: Formal Education, Distance Mode, Teacher Education, quality Indicators

Introduction

Education takes a leading role for developing the humans' capacity through developing promoting their academic and professional knowledge, skills, attitude and behavior. Throughout the world schools, colleges, training centers and universities of public private sector play the role to provide all types of educational and training programs. Therefore the people who do not have the opportunities to get formal education and training at any level due to their limited resources or personal constraints. For them distance and non formal education provides a second chance to get their education. Across the world it is acknowledged that distance education mode is complementing the formal system of education. Distance education can be more significant and effective in terms of self-study and using technologies as methodology for instructional tasks and interaction among teachers and students.

According to Moore (2003) "Distance education is planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organizational and administrative arrangements".

The California Distance Learning Projects definition is: "Distance Learning (DL) is an instructional delivery system which contacts learners with educational resources. DL provides educational access to learners not enrolled in educational institutions and can augment the learning opportunities of current students. The implementation of DL is a process which uses available resources and will evolve to incorporate emerging technologies." (<http://www.educationworld.com>).

The United States Distance Learning Association defines distance education as: "The acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated

information and instruction, encompassing all technologies and other forms of learning at a distance." (www.usdla.org).

While focusing all these concepts of distance education it can be summarized as:

- In distance education teachers and students physically are at distance.
- Technology (Electronic or non electronic) bridges up the interaction and instructional gap.
- Second chance of education for updating knowledge and personal skills is given to adult learners who have limited resources, time, money, family and personal constraints, long distance, physical disability etc.

Overall the success of distance mode relies on appropriate planning and wisely implementation or execution of programs and this success not only is responsibility of administration of institution but all faculty members supporting staff, facilitators and students will have to do consistent and integrated efforts. These efforts will ensure the success and quality of distance education (www.uiidaho.edu).

According to Frydenberg (2002) stakeholders, students, evaluators, institutions and governments mostly provide the feedback about the quality of distance education.

As teacher education program of AIOU is offered at large scale so the question arises what is the quality of this program. Either it is fulfilling the quality measures of teacher education. For answering these questions this study was conducted to examine the quality of teacher education programs. In this regards few objectives were formulated.

Objectives of the Study

While focusing the quality indicators and research questions these objectives were formulated:

1. To examine the quality of different components of teachers education program offered by AIOU.
2. To examine the significant role of AIOU in providing teacher education
3. To explore the factors affecting the quality of teacher education program of AIOU. (4) To give suggestions for improving the quality of teacher education program.

Review of Literature

During the last many years noticeable promotion has been done in distance education throughout the Asia. Here are at least ten mega universities with having large member of distance learners in world are working. As Asia is considered main provider of distance education accordingly stakeholders of national and international communities are too much concerned about the quality of distance education.

While focusing the quality concerns of stakeholders all distance education universities are making efforts to monitor and improve quality of education. For this purpose all distance education universities are adopting quality assurance system. In Asian countries accreditation, academic audits, performance based funding and performance reporting approaches are being used in distance education mode (<http://www.pandora-asia.org>)

Pakistan is also included in the list of those counties of Asia and world where illiteracy rate is very high. It is a developing country with having large number of population among this large number contribution of educated and literate people is less than many other developing countries of Asia such as Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh (UNESCO, 2009). For increasing the literacy rate and providing the educational facilities to the masses formal and distance education systems are supporting each other. Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is the foremost institute of distance education mode to provide the educational opportunities to all.

Pakistan is developing country with having 200 million people among this huge population contribution of educated and literate people is very low. It has the highest illiteracy rate and the second largest out of school population in the world (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Pakistan#cite_ref-10). For fulfilling the educational needs of people at large scale formal system of education is not sufficient. To complement the formal system efforts has been made to promote the distance and non-formal education in Pakistan. In this regards Allama Iqbal Open University is leading institution of distance mode which is providing the education to 1.3 million people from secondary school certificate to Ph.D level. Accordingly it is offering educational programs for different levels starting from basic literacy programs to Ph.D programs. Among these programs teacher education program is the largest one in terms of courses and number of students. (<http://www.aiou.edu.pk>).

Before going on the quality of teacher education of AIOU, question arises. What is teacher education and why it is significant for society.

Teacher play important role in the entire system of education. It is truly said that no system of education is above the standard of its teachers. They have significant role for developing the system of education. Future of the nation is in the hands of teachers they can affect the life of their pupils through their better personal, social and professional development. For valuing the quality of education teachers play important role and quality of education directly links with quality of teachers and for producing the quality teachers, effective teacher education programs are required. For this purpose master of teacher education program intends to provide the chance of academic and professional development to teachers.

Aggarwal (2004) defines that teacher education is that knowledge, skill and ability which is relevant to the life of teacher as a teacher.

According to national education commission (1959) following teacher education were recommended:

- To train the trainers academically sound in their subjects.
- To give them training about pedagogical skills related to their subjects.
- To enable them for understanding the psychology of children.
- To increase the professional commitment and honor among the teachers.

As education for any group of people is considered the best investment for national development through the development of human. For ensuring this development formal and distance education systems are contributing equally. In Pakistan Allam Iqbal Open University is playing significant role to provide the education facilities at large scale for all levels through distance mode. Teacher Education Program is the largest one program of AIOU. This program intends to prepare planners, managers, teachers, counselor and researchers in the field of education. This program comprises compulsory and elective courses related to field teacher education. For making the teacher education program compatible with other teacher training institutions in Pakistan. AIOU is also offering the pre-service and in-service teacher education programs while focusing the same criteria, professional standards and rules recommended by Higher Education Commission Pakistan. Hence from the last few years many institutional higher education programs of distance mode has gained serious attention by other institutions, stakeholders, researchers, policy makers and scholars. Mainly stakeholders demand the quality

assurance in distance education. For addressing this demand administration and academic faculty make efforts to incorporate the quality issues through which distance education can be improved and modified.

According to Harman (2000) higher education institutions adopt the procedure of quality assurance through which performance of institutions is monitored systematically. It also ensures the quality of outputs and improvements. Overall quality assurance procedure helps the institutions, students, staff and stakeholder to monitor performance against objectives.

Further through different studies quality of distance education mode has been examined such as Bulewati & Zuhairi (2007) analyzed the quality of management system which takes place for developing and implementing the institutional strategies and policies related to improvement of programs of distance education.

Nugrahem et. al. (2013) viewed the perception of learners about the quality of distance education system. Daugherty and Barbara (1998) also examined the perceptions of faculty members and students about the quality of web based instruction in distance mode of education.

Cashion and Palmieri (2002) also analyzed the quality of online learning while focusing the quality of distance education mode its different components were examined.

Overall quality assurance for any program concentrates on those administrative and procedural activities which ensure the quality of system in the light of its objectives and standards. Quality assurance is a monitoring and feedback which is done systematically. Though it measures the quality of outputs or products but quality of any output or product or service is determined by the users or employers (<https://en.wikipedia.org>).

Jung (2011) developed ten categories model which identified different components related to quality of distance learning: faculty support, students support, information and publicity, quality assurance, material development, delivery mechanism, interaction process among faculty, students and management, institutional infrastructure and credibility. On the basis of these dimensions existing study was conducted. Overall for evaluating the quality of M.Ed Program of distance mode, self-instructional print material, delivery mechanism, students support service, workshop, tutorials, evaluation system, educational facilities infrastructure and credibility of institution were focused during the analysis of program.

M.Ed (Teacher Education Program) of AIOU

In 1974 AIOU was established to provide the educational opportunities to the people at their doorstep. It also helps those workers who do not leave their work, job but want to improve their qualification and professional skills. AIOU has opened the new venues for the adult learners in professional, scientific and technical fields. At the same time as focusing the continuing education of professionals AIOU is also offering teacher education programs from primary school teaching to Ph.D program in teacher education. Hence during this study M.Ed teacher education program was focused for examining its quality and credibility. This program comprised on following components:

Self-Instructional Material

As mostly students' learning relies on this material and the quality of M.Ed program depends upon the quality of material. Self-instructional print material of M.Ed program is developed by faculty members with collaboration of subject experts while following the criteria and standards of distance mode. This material is sent to the enrolled students of M.Ed program. Overall this material helps the students for their self study and preparation of assignments and exam. Existing study was intended to examine the quality of this material as it is linchpin of distance mode.

Teaching Methodology

More or less curriculum of M.Ed program is same in formal and distance mode but process of teaching methodology creates the difference between face to face and distance mode of interaction. In distance mode technologies (electronic or, non electronic, audio, video or print) are used for teaching learning process.

Assignments

Assignments are kind of formative assessment of students during M.Ed program. Students prepare two assignments for each course with the help of self-instructional print material. As per schedule students submit their assignments to their assigned tutors. Tutors mark these assignments and return back to the students with their feedback comments. Hence assignments are compulsory components of distance

mode which must be passed on given criteria. Quality of assignments not only affects the quality of program but the quality of institution as well.

Tutorial Meetings

During the semester qualified tutors are appointed for the guidance of students in their each course. For this purpose tutorial sessions are assigned to tutors which are conducted weekly at registered study centers. Students are supposed to attend these tutorials for seeking guidance from their tutors.

Workshops

At the end of semester face to face workshop for each course of M.Ed program is compulsory component. These workshops are arranged at prescribed study centers of AIOU. All students are required to attend these workshops. During these workshop subject experts, tutors and resource persons deliver the lectures for each course. Through these workshops students get chance of face to face interaction with their tutors and subjects experts for improving their knowledge and skills.

Final Examination

At the end of the semester this exam is conducted for each course and final examination is form of summative evaluation. . The weightage of final exam for each course is 70%. Hence the success of the students depends that students should pass both the assignments and examination. The weightage of assignments marks are 30%. Overall aggregate 40% marks for each course are required for qualifying the M.E.d program.

For analyzing the quality of these components existing study was conducted.

Research Methodology

During the study survey design was adopted. For collection data 200 students and 50 tutors of M.Ed program session 2014 were selected randomly. A questionnaire on three point scale was developed while focusing the different aspects such as self-instructional material, teaching learning process, students support service, workshops, assessment process and institutional credibility. During the workshops of the

students questionnaire was administered and information was collected. For analysis of data percentage was used. On the basis of data analysis conclusions and recommendations were drawn.

Data Analysis

Table 1
Quality of Curriculum

Teachers			Statement	Student		
Never	To some Extent	Mostly		Mostly	To some Extent	Never
30%	30%	40%	Curriculum/course content fulfill the national goals	47%	45%	8%
20%	25%	55%	Curriculum/course content is well structured	51%	31%	18%
45%	35%	20%	Curriculum/course content according to the mental level of the learners.	10%	25%	65%
61%	23%	16%	Curriculum/course content fulfills the needs of learners.	10%	19%	71%
72%	16%	12%	Course content helps to cope with global challenges.	17%	24%	59%

This table shows that majority of the students (47%) and tutors (40%) agreed that curriculum fulfills the national goals. Respectively 55% tutors and 51% students opined that curriculum was well structured. Hence 65%, students and 45% tutors agreed that curriculum was not according to mental level of students. While 71% students and 59% tutors opined that course content did not fulfill the needs of learned. 72% tutors and 59% students were of the opinion that course content did not cope with global challenges.

Table 2
Quality of Teaching Learning

Teachers			Statement	Student		
Never	To some Extent	Mostly		Mostly	To some Extent	Never
6%	25%	69%	Resource person are well trained and highly qualified.	53%	23%	24%
10%	19%	71%	Resource persons are knowledgeable about their field.	57%	21%	22%
18%	23%	59%	Students' interaction during teaching learning process is ensured.	21%	20%	59%
16%	21%	63%	Resource person use innovative teaching learning techniques.	37%	49%	14%
10%	18%	72%	Teaching learning activities focus the Development of mind, body and heart of learner.	10%	19%	71%

Above table reveals that majority of the tutors and students (69% & 53%) agreed that resource persons were well qualified and trained. They were also knowledgeable about their subjects as 71% tutors and 57% students viewed. Majority of the students 59%, 49% & 71% stated that students' interaction, using innovative techniques and balance development of students were not ensured during teaching learning process. Hence majority of the tutors (59%, 63%, 72%) respectively were in favor of these aspects'

Table 3
Quality of Assignments

Teachers			Statement	Student		
Never	To some Extent	Mostly		Mostly	To some Extent	Never
62%	23%	15%	Quality of assignment is satisfactory.	56%	26%	18%
11%	10%	79%	Material helps to prepare the assignment.	76%	19%	5%
13%	21%	66%	Marking of assignments is satisfactory	24%	23%	53%
13%	36%	51%	Feedback is given by tutors on assignment	5%	13%	81%
16%	32%	52%	Assignments are sent back by tutors timely	12%	15%	73%

The table above showed student and teachers view about quality of assignments 62% tutors were not satisfied with the quality of assignments. 81% of students were of the view that feedback is not given and 73% of students were not agreed with the notion that assignments are sent back by tutors timely. About half of the students 53% and majority of teachers 66% were satisfied with the marking of assignments.

Table 4
Quality of Workshop and Tutorials

Teachers			Statement	Student		
Never	To some Extent	Mostly		Mostly	To some Extent	Never
9%	19%	72%	Workshop and tutorials are well organized	21%	61%	18%
-	19%	81%	Workshop and tutorials of each course helps to understand the text material	53%	27%	20%
21%	23%	56%	Organizers of workshops are cooperative	31%	53%	16%
62%	31%	7%	Study centers are fully equipped and congenial for teaching learning process.	7%	11%	82%
67%	27%	05%	Tutors and students ensure their participation for tutorials	8%	19%	73%

The table above depicts the views of teachers and students regarding quality of workshop and tutorials majority of both teachers (81 percent) and half of the students (53%) viewed workshops and tutorials as helpful in understanding the text material 72% of teachers viewed workshops and tutorials as well organized activities whereas 61% students said that the workshops and tutorials were well organized to some extent. Majority of both teachers and students 82% and 62% respectively were not satisfied with the study centers as being fully equipped and congenial for teaching and learning process. Participation in tutorials was another factor where majority both of students and teachers 73% and 67% viewed as not at all. More than half 56% teachers believed that workshop organizers are cooperative but 53% students thought workshop organizers are cooperative only to some extent.

Table 5
Quality of Assessment Process

Teachers			Statement	Student		
Never	To some Extent	Mostly		Mostly	To some Extent	Never
20%	21%	59%	Assessment process is fair	12%	21%	67%
10%	19%	71%	Mal practices are used in assessment	4%	13%	83%
8%	11%	81%	Assessment policy is clear to all students	56%	24%	20%
58%	23%	19%	Your recommendations are acknowledged for improving the assessment system	8%	13%	79%
89%	11%		Marking system for examination is reliable.	6%	9%	85%

This table highlights that assessment process is not fair (59% tutors & 67% students viewed). Malpractices are used as 71% tutors and 83% students agreed. Marking system is not reliable as 89% tutors and 85% students agreed. Hence majority agreed that assessment policy was clear to students (81% tutors & 56% students). And their recommendations for improving the assessment system are not acknowledged as 79% students and 58% tutors opined.

Table 6
Quality of Students support services

Teachers			Statement	Student		
Never	To some Extent	Mostly		Mostly	To some Extent	Never
59%	12%	23%	System of students support services is effective	21%	23%	56%
52%	21%	19%	Your query about any aspect was addressed properly.	15%	31%	53%
53%	27%	20%	Regional offices facilitate learners	15%	23%	62%
31%	18%	51%	Academic support is given to students properly.	19%	29%	53%
21%	23%	56%	Students support services need improvement.	81%	13%	6%

This table reveals that students support service was not effective (56% students & 59% tutors). Queries were not addressed properly (53%

students and 52% tutors viewed). Majority of the respondents (62% students & 53% tutors) opined that regional offices did not facilitate the learners. 53% students disagreed and 51% tutors agreed for providing the proper academic support. 81% students and 56% tutors agreed that students support services need improvement.

Table 7
Quality of distance education

Teachers			Statement	Student		
Never	To some Extent	Mostly		Mostly	To some Extent	Never
8%	19%	73%	Distance education system provides better chances to students for their professional development.	79%	17%	4%
58%	23%	19%	Physical infrastructure of teaching learning venues is of high quality.	11%	23%	66%
58%	29%	13%	Education facilities are available for teacher education program.	19%	27%	54%
46%	33%	21%	Teacher education program of distance mode is credible (among the stakeholders).	16%	31%	53%
57%	26%	17%	Teacher education program of distance mode fulfills the quality measures.	21%	19%	60%

Above table depicts that distance education mostly provides the better chance of professional development as 73% tutors and 79% students viewed. Majority of the respondents (66% & 58%) argued that quality of physical infrastructure was not good. 54% students and 58% tutors opined that education facilities were not available properly. This program was not credible among the stakeholders as 53% students and 46% viewed. Majority of respondents (60% students & 57% tutors) opined that M.Ed of distance mode did not fulfill the quality measures.

Conclusions and Discussion

As quality of curriculum is measured if curriculum fulfills the prescribed standards, national, international and learners needs and demands. Hence existing curriculum of M.Ed program of AIOU does not cope with learners' needs and global challenges. Though it is well

structured and fulfills the national goals but it is not according to mental level of the learners. On the basis of this data it is concluded that quality of curriculum does not meet the quality standards of distance mode. It needs improvement as curriculum is the index of M.Ed program and its quality directly links with quality of program.

No education system is better without its teachers. Majority of the tutors are well trained, qualified and knowledgeable about their subjects/fields. Teachers also agree that resource persons effectively use the innovative teaching learning techniques and encourage the student interaction during teaching learning process. Overall their teaching comprises the balance development of students. Hence on the basis of students perception regarding the quality of teaching learning process it is concluded that resource persons do not focus students interaction, balance development of students and use of innovative technology during their teaching. For analyzing the quality of any educational program its teaching process is directly measured through measuring the learning process of learners. Overall for measuring the quality of teaching learning process academic and professional qualification, using effective teaching techniques for effective learning, ensuring students interaction and focusing students' balance development are quality indicators of teaching learning process. For measuring the quality of teaching learning process of distance mode these indicators are ensured. Hence on the basis of data analysis quality of teaching learning process of M.Ed program of distance mode needs improvement.

Workshops and tutorials contribute lot to enhance the knowledge of students about their subjects. These are face to face components for increasing the interaction among students and tutors. Though both components bridge up the distance but there is need to improve the quality of study centers. As many study centers are not fully equipped with teaching learning facilities. For enhancing the credibility of workshops and tutorials tutors and students need to ensure their presences. As lot of complaints have been registered about the absentees of the students.

Most of the respondents believed that material help in preparation of assignments. A remarkable difference in opinion of teachers and students was noted in terms of satisfactory marking, feedback and timely return of assignments. While focusing the importance of evaluation process in academic program respondents were asked about the quality of assessment process. In this regard different characteristics were of examination systems such as reliability, validity and credibility were examined. It is concluded that assessment process is not fair due to the

unreliable marking policy, using mal practices during examination and assessment. For improving the quality of assessment system teachers and students frequently give their proposals and information about weaknesses of assessment system. But these are not acknowledged and implemented properly. Hence respondents of both categories agreed that mostly students are well aware about assessment policy. For measuring the quality of any program its assessment system is given more attention. As evaluation is taken as decision making about the promotion or improvement of any activity. If evaluation system is reliable, fair and transparent then quality of program is appreciated everywhere. Evaluation process directly links with components of curriculum, teaching methodology and evaluation system itself. As evaluation is not an end but it means to end, so it should be fulfill the criteria of fairness, reliability and usability. But unfortunately the quality of assessment system of M.Ed program is very poor due to the use of mal practices and unreliable marking system in examination and assignments. Even though complaints against poor quality of assessment system if submitted by the students or by anyone are not addressed properly. Overall for ensuring the quality of M.Ed program quality of assessment system needs improvement.

Students support services comprise the policy and guidance related to supporting students in academic and administrative aspects of their study program. Through analyzing the quality of students support services it is concluded that students support service system needs improvement. As it is supposed to address the queries of students effectively and timely. Regional office are mainly responsible to facilitate the students but these are not functioning properly to provide academic and administrative support to students. Weak students support service system of AIOU is discouraging the students resultantly they do not complete their education. For ensuring the quality of M.Ed program of AIOU students' support system needs improvement.

Credibility of any program or institution is based on the acceptance level of the stakeholders at national and international level. To what extent this program is accredited. For answering this question respondents' perspectives were examined. Accordingly majority of the respondent agree that distance education system provides the better chance for the professional development of adult learners. But physical infrastructure of study centers and classrooms is not adequate to fulfill the requirement of teaching learning activities. Educational facilities are not available there. These aspects affect the quality of teaching learning process of distance mode. Due to the short comings of teaching learning

process stakeholders such as students, employers and parents are not satisfied with the quality and credibility of degree of M.Ed Program. Overall respondents are of the opinion that teacher education program of distance mode does not fulfill quality measures. Hence for enhancing the credibility of institution nationally and internationally it needs the changes and improvements in its all components. Though distance mode is highly appreciated due to its flexibility throughout the world but programs of AIOU are facing lot of criticism in society due to ineffectiveness of their components.

Recommendations

- All the programs and courses of distance mode should be aligned with the mission goals and objectives of distance philosophy of institution. All the components of program must be articulated under the distinctive nature of learners. Overall study program may fulfill the local, national and global needs of the learners.
- For enhancing the credibility of AIOU and its programs national policy benchmarks may strictly be observed during the formulation and execution of academic programs. On the basis of these benchmarks institution can be compared with other similar institutions to estimate the credibility level.
- Feedback and solicit information and guidance of relevant stakeholders can be obtained. On the basis of these information programs can be improved and modified.
- Institution must have to take steps for monitoring the quality of all components such as curriculum, delivery mechanism, workshops, students support services and assessment process. Through the quality of these components program will get the credibility among the stakeholders at national and international level.

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