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EFFECTIVENESS OF DISTANCE TEACHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

ABSTRACT

Improved distance education practices have the potential to enhance educational outcomes, especially when the amount and kind of learner interaction is increased using technology-supported collaborative learning. This paper describes a study undertaken to evaluate the results of Open University regarding teacher training as well as to examine the extent to which teachers who obtained their degrees from AIOU possessed such competency; survey questionnaires were devised to gather data from several perspectives. The questionnaires were piloted and revised in response to comments from participants representing the sample groups. The populations sampled for this study were composed of: secondary School Teachers who have a B.Ed degree from AIOU and are working in Pakistani schools and teacher educators from the Faculty of Education, AIOU, and Pakistan. On the basis of the data discussion, conclusion and recommendations are made.

PROCEDURE

The study based on descriptive research design. Likert scale/questionnaires were used for the survey. Once the representative population was carefully defined, a representative sample was drawn. The detail of each category is given below:

Secondary School Teachers

A list of the teachers was obtained from the three different offices i.e. the Federal Directorate of Education Islamabad, Federal

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Government Educational Institutions (Cantt/Garrison) Rawalpindi and Executive District Officer Multan. From these a separate list of AIOU teachers who qualified between 2000 and 2005 was prepared and these teachers were sent a survey. A systematic sampling procedure was applied for teachers using Burns' (1990, p.60) method described as "if the population can be listed then a sample can be drawn at fixed intervals from the list…. .In systematic sampling, a starting number between 1 and 3 is chosen randomly and selection continues by taking every third person from that starting number". In this study a 1-in-3 ratio was used to derive a sample of teachers from Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Multan.

Teacher Educators of AIOU

The survey questionnaire was administered to the total population of the academicians of AIOU because their number of members was a manageable size.

LITERATURE

The conventional formal system of education has long been used for the training of teachers. With the passage of time many factors led to the adoption of the distance mode of education for teacher education due to an increase in the need for a greater number of teachers. Perraton (1997) says that distance education has established its legitimacy in delivering teacher education at a distance, and Moore and Thompson (1997) provide numerous examples of the effectiveness of distance-delivered teacher education.

Distance education as we know it today is a relatively new paradigm. Distance education is meant for education to the population which is scattered and has least opportunities for further studies. It has proved very effective mode of education at higher education level nowadays. In this way its weight increases due to increase in the demand of educational opportunity and provision of programs for different groups. (Garrison, 1986; 1987; Gaspar & Thompson, 1995). Amundsen and Bernard (1989) mentioned "… the definitive characteristic of distance education is the separation between 'teacher' and learner and among learners.

As a result, interpersonal communication is not a natural characteristic of distance education" (p.7).

Gaspar and Thompson (1995), indicates potential of distance education saying that it is amalgamation of print material to educational teachnology/ICTs. Keegan (1986) talks of its six major features: (a) the separation of teacher and learner, (b) the role of educational organization, (c) the place of technological medium, (d) two-way communication, (e) the separation of the learner and the learning groups, and (f) industrialization.

According to Bates (1986), distance education is based on two approaches i.e

- structured, pre-programmed learning materials
- computer communication functions.

When both above approaches are combined the fourth generation of distance education emerges (Lauzon and Moore, 1989) that has no barriers of time and place.

The significant difference between distance and conational education is separation of the learner (space and time) during majority of teaching learning activities. Keegan (2002, p.20) defines distance education as "Teaching and learning in which learning normally occurs in a different place from teaching". He discusses how teaching is to a large degree mediated through various technologies and learning generally takes place on an individual basis through supported independent study in the student's home, or work place. The quality of the teaching materials and the level and variety support for independent study depends on the nature and resources of the institution or organization responsible for a given programme, and the available communication infrastructure.

Distance education is sometimes taken to mean the use of radio or television and at others the use of the Internet. Whereas open learning suggests that anyone can enroll and start and finish when they like. "It is an organized educational activity based on the use of teaching materials, in which constraints on study are minimized in terms of either of access, or time and place, pace,

method of study, or any combination of these"(Perraton, at al., 2001). Hence the term 'open and distance learning' is used as an umbrella term to cover educational approaches of this kind that reaches teachers in their schools, provides learning sources for them, or enables them to qualify without attending college in person or by opening up new opportunities for keeping up to date no matter where or when they want to study (Perraton, at al., 2002).

The latter part of the twentieth century has been marked by technology changes that are increasingly affecting every aspect of human life. The industrial age has been left behind. Now this is the age of information and communication. The source of power in the information/communication age is knowledge (Drucker, 1994; Toffler, 1990). Drucker (1994), who coined the term, "knowledge society", states that in such a society more knowledge, and especially advanced knowledge will be acquired well past the age of formal schooling, through processes that do not center on traditional school.

Distance education is considered as a part of open learning and that is why currently people use a term ODL (Open & Distance Learning) and that is why it offers education beyond the restriction of time and space.

Distance education is often also flexible. Formally, educated individuals can also continue their education through this system in which the student and learner are at a distance from one another. They share their activities through correspondence, face-to face contact and through the use of various instructional modes.

For the training of teachers, distance education has been considered as an important mode. Perraton (2000) gives us a clear picture of the achievements of distance education in training teachers,

> "Distance education has gone some way to establishing a significant and legitimate way of training teachers. The evidence, on its success, is probably no worse than the

> comparable evidence on conventional teacher education, and, in some cases, it can have economic advantages. And yet it remains on the sidelines". (p. 36)

In Pakistan distance education system of learning, as the learner and teacher are at a distance from one another, learning materials are usually sent to students by postal services or via the internet. This material should been written in a simple and understandable language. For the guidance of students, necessary diagrams, self-assessment questions and activities are added in the course. It is considered made sure the students understand the material without any external assistance. Each course may be a half credit or full credit. A full credit course has eighteen units and half credit course has nine units. Normally a unit discusses a topic in detail. One unit covers the time duration of one week with two hours daily working. Radio and TV programmes are broadcast for and additional support to the distance learners.

Distance education has been defined as "an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner" (Perraton, at al., 2001). Distance education can be a part of an open learning system which offers open access to courses, or it can be a part of a structured formal degree programme. This study is concerned with the educational process in which a significant proportion of learning and teaching happens while learners' tutors are removed from each other in space and time. The learner can study at home, at the place of work, or at a host university campus, in learning centers or through a combination of such arrangements.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data is presented and discussed below category/sample wise.

Teachers

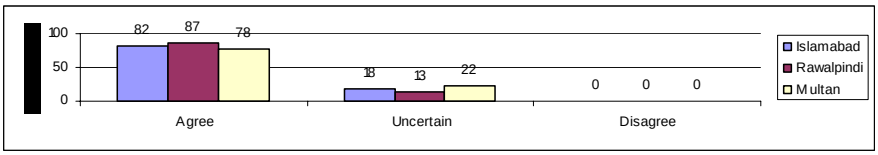
Face-to-face (F2F) contact in distance education

The teachers were asked, "Face to face contact in Distance Education facilitates student learning". A majority (87% from

Rawalpindi, 82% from Islamabad and 78% from Multan) of the teachers agreed with this statement but some of them (22% from Multan, 18% from Islamabad and 135 from Rawalpindi) were uncertain. However, there were no responses that disagreed.

Figure 1

F2F contact in distance education



(N= 92 (Islamabad 44; Rawalpindi 30 and Multan 18)

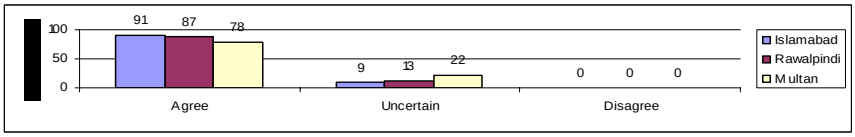
Distance education programmes are implemented through different components and F2F is one of them. In AIOU, it is not compulsory for students to attend F2F sessions of tutorials. Instead, it is optional but workshops are compulsory. The majority said that the F2F sessions in distance education facilitated learning and a minority were uncertain which may show that those people who were uncertain had poor experiences with distance education tutoring.

Participation in tutorial meetings

The teachers were asked whether the regular participation in tutorial meetings was useful for them or not. A majority of teachers (Islamabad 91%, Rawalpindi 87% and Multan 78%) agreed and some (Multan 22%, Rawalpindi13% and Islamabad 9%) were uncertain.

Figure 2

Participation in tutorial meetings



(N= 92 (Islamabad 44; Rawalpindi 30 and Multan 18)

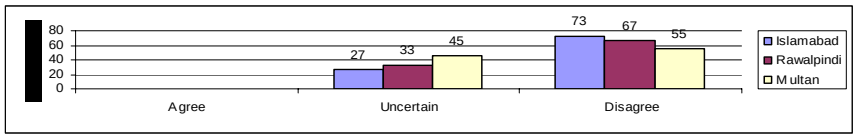
The regular participation in tutorial meetings provides an opportunity for interaction between tutors and learners. However, if a tutor contributed little or didn't attend a meeting it may cause frustration, resulting in the uncertain responses.

Availability of media at study centres

Participants were asked if the students had an access to the use of electronic media at the study centres. A majority of them (72% from Islamabad, 67% from Rawalpindi and 55% from Multan) disagreed and some (45% from Multan, 335 from Rawalpindi and 27% from Islamabad) were uncertain.

Figure 3

Availability of media at study centres



(N= 92 (Islamabad 44; Rawalpindi 30 and Multan 18)

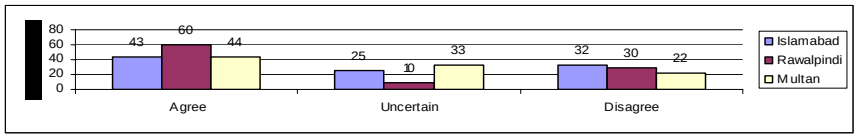
Tutorial meetings are held in the study centres of AIOU in the evening hours. The study centres are mostly public sector school/college/regional campus buildings and the head of the school/college is nominated as a study centre coordinator. The schools/colleges seem to be lacking electronic media that meet the needs of teacher trainees. Due to this lack of technology, most of them disagreed or were uncertain.

Capability of tutors

They were further asked if the tutors were trained to teach by distance methods. There was a mixed response i.e. from Islamabad 43% agreed, from Rawalpindi 60% agreed, and from Multan 44% agreed. Some of the respondents i.e. 33% from Multan, 25% Islamabad and 10% from Rawalpindi. With regard to disagreement, the response rate was: 32% from Islamabad, 30% from Rawalpindi and 22% from Multan.

Figure 4

Capability of tutors



(N= 92 (Islamabad 44; Rawalpindi 30 and Multan 18**)**

The very scattered response indicates that tutors could not prove their efficiency as distance educators to their students. The tutors are appointed from the working school/college/university teachers. They work in their organizations fulltime and register to work as tutors with AIOU in the evening. Being part-time teachers they may be less accountable and less dedicated. Moreover, there is no provision for the training of tutors especially in teaching in distance education. However, they are given an extensive briefing in the concerned regional office at the start of each semester.

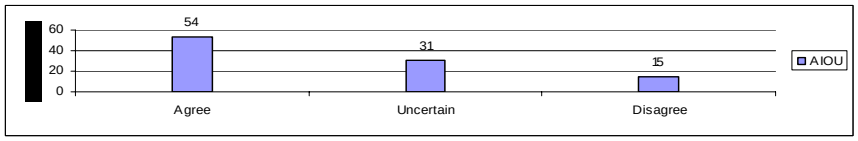
Teacher Educators

Radio programmes

The AIOU teacher educators were asked whether radio programmes were developed for the trainee teachers. The figure given below mentions diverse views of the teacher educators as 31% of them remained uncertain, 15% of them disagreed and 54% agreed upon.

Figure 5

Radio programmes



(N=13)

In the beginning most of the teacher training programmes were not telecast are broadcast. Recently, the same programmes

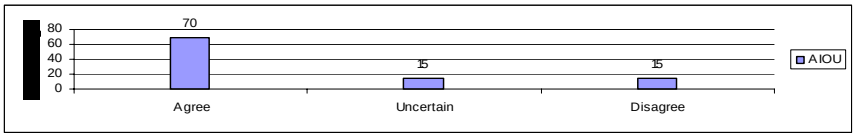
are produced and broadcast on radio and television. However, some of the courses are yet to be produced, as responded by the tutors.

TV programmes

AIOU uses radio and TV as a means of education for the students in urban and remote areas. Hence, they were asked whether Television programmes were being telecast for the B.Ed students. Here a majority of them i.e. 69% agreed but 15% were uncertain whereas 15% disagreed.

Figure 6

TV programmes



(N=13)

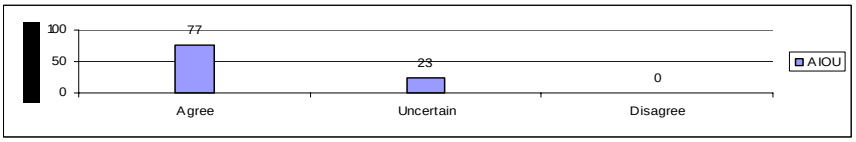
The same situation exists with radio as it does with TV. There seems to be a gap in coordination between the Institute of Educational Technology of AIOU and the teacher educators who are not updated with the position of radio and TV programmes being produced as well as telecast.

Interactive instructional material

The instructional material of distance education programmes should be interactive in nature. Therefore, the teachers educators were asked whether the instructional material provides interaction for the students in their studies. A majority of the respondents 77% agreed and the remaining 23% were uncertain.

Figure 7

Interactive instructional material



(N=13)

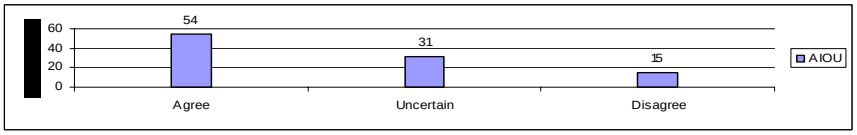
Teacher training courses (study guides and allied material/reader) are mostly developed by the faculty but additional books are recommended. The material developed by AIOU teacher educators is designed to be interactive but the recommended books may not necessarily be interactive because those are not specifically designed for distance learners.

Courses in distance education system and school system

The academics were asked whether in the distance education system the teachers are prepared according to the needs of curriculum of their corresponding school level. 53% teacher educators agreed with the statement. Whereas, 31% were uncertain and 15% disagreed.

Figure 8

Courses in distance education system and school system



(N=13)

The curriculum of the teacher training programme needs to be commensurate made in accordance with the requirements of the curriculum and textbooks of schools so that the trainee, after qualifying for the degree, should be able to teach in the schools. There is a lack of coordination between the course writers of the

B.Ed programme and the course writers of school text books. That explains why the academics were uncertain or disagreed.

CONCLUSION

The F2F component of AIOU i.e. tutorial meetings and workshops were considered as a very important and facilitating component for learners. There is paucity of necessary media at the study centres for the B.Ed students. The tutors lack a grasp of the concepts of distance learning.

Both the radio and the TV are used for education purposes at AIOU. However TV is used more than radio. The university uses interactive instructional material. A slight majority said that the courses of teacher training at AIOU match with the corresponding school level. A majority of participants said that the F2F tutorial component was useful for learning. There were mixed responses about the ability of tutors. There were no adequate arrangements for media at study centres.

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