

Role of Allama Iqbal Open University in Promoting Education among Rural Women in Southern Punjab

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Abstract

The study was designed to investigate the role of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in promoting education among rural women. The study was conducted in Southern Punjab. The objective of the study was; 1) to identify the role of AIOU in promoting education among rural women 2) To evaluate the role of tutors in promoting education among rural women. It was descriptive research in nature and used survey method for data collection. The Population of the study was consisted of 8387 female students and 422 tutors in Bahawalpur and Vehari region. The researcher collected data through simple random sampling technique from 308 female students and 177 tutors. Two separate questionnaires were developed for students and tutors. The collected data was analyzed with frequently used statistical techniques of frequency score, percentage score and mean score. It was found that AIOU is playing an active role in promoting education among rural female students, in facilitates in different academic activities and through different administrative measures. Another finding of the study informed us that tutorial meetings provide opportunities to the female student to interact with their fellow, so that female rural students enhance their education. The study concluded that tutors are playing an active role in tutorial meetings in promoting female education through interaction among female rural students.

Key words: *Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Education, Rural women*

1. Introduction

Education provides sound foundation for the progress of a nation. Education is a source of transmitting culture from one generation to next coming generations. The first revelation of the Holy Quran begins with the verse, "Read with the name of Allah Who created man out of a clot of congealed blood, Read and the Lord is the most bountiful. He, who taught (use of) the pen, taught man which he knew not (Al-Quran, 96: 1- 5). Ambica (2003) education is the knowledge of putting ones' abilities to make utilize it for the welfare of self and the society. An educated person may use his/her abilities for the prosperity of a nation at large. Din (1999) asserted that nobody can deny the importance of education as education is tool for the development and success of a country.

According to Yasunaga (2014) the categories of non-formal education are: Vocational education, skill oriented education and correspondence education. In correspondence education, the learning material is sent to the learners through post. The course work and assignments are sent to the students; they cover their course work and solve their assignments at their free time. They send their assignments to their tutors. The tutors mark these assignments and return them with comments. Allama Iqbal Open University is providing distance and non-formal education to the people of Pakistan within the country as well as in the foreign countries.

Rashid (1998) describes that the future of Pakistan is its youth. Rural youth especially rural women can play an important role in the economic progress of the country. Rural women work for more than 14 hours without any rest. No nation can develop without the development of its home. The education of women has great significance. The involvement of women is an effective mean for rural development. The provision of education and training to female helps in rural development.

Women empowerment is vital for gender equality. A woman is said to be empowered if she is provided free access to material resources, decent employment, political decision making, free choices and legal rights, health facilities and quality education (Saigol, 2011)

Despite the increase in Pakistan's literacy rate the educational status of Pakistani women is still at the lowest in the world. Education has been central significance in the development of human society. Education is human right. It means no girl is to be excluded from school irrespective of her country's situation. The education of rural people is a difficult task for the government, which is fulfilled through open and distance institutions in Pakistan. Mahmood (2011) found that Pakistan is facing a main challenge of majority of out of school children. A large number of illiterates are from rural areas. He concluded that limited availability of girls' public schools in rural areas was the major barrier towards poor female literacy rate. Old teaching methods and schooling facilities were also the common reasons for low literacy rate in rural areas of Pakistan.

Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is the first Open University in Asia. It was established in 1974 and now has earned the status of Mega University. AIOU is a Distance Education institution, which provides multi-disciplinary education from basic education to doctoral level programs. The university employs non-formal method of correspondence, radio and television broadcasts, special textbooks and reading materials prepared on self-learning basis, part-time tutors available nearest to the student's residences. The university has more than 43 regional campuses and centers in various parts of the country to manage and assist 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 enroll them as the university's part-time tutors. The number of registered tutors with AIOU is more than 30,000. 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 remarks. The regional campuses also arrange practical training, teaching practice, workshops and seminars and facilitate holding of examinations in their own areas. (Vice Chancellor's report (2010-11)).

AIOU is playing fundamental role in women empowerment and the national development. More female students are being enrolled in AIOU as compared to male. In 2011 total number of students enrolled in Punjab was 849400. The ratio of female students was 59%, larger than male students i.e. 41%. However, there are many problems regarding female access to higher education

i.e. restricted culture, poverty, insecurity, marriage, unimportance of education, negative attitude of parents and unawareness about distance education system. Therefore, an incentive package for female students may be launched countrywide especially for culturally restricted female learners of remote areas.

Jumani, Safdar, Bhatti and Ghazi (2013) stated that role of AIOU in empowering women is notable and distance education seems to be a blessing especially for females of rural areas, married and job holders. Distance system of education has paved a way for getting higher education for culturally constrained females.

Distance education is the process of teaching outside the traditional classroom setting or teaching students from a distance. Greenberg (1998) defines distance learning as a planned teaching/learning experience that uses a wide range of technologies to access learners at a distance and is devised to encourage learner interaction and certification of learning. Teaster and Blieszner (1999) say that the term distance education is applied to many instructional methods: however, its primary distinction is this ration of teacher and the learner with respect to space and time.

In 1986, Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Islamabad started the Women's Secondary Education Project (WSEP) through distance learning in order to make secondary education approachable to women who are unable to get admission to formal high school after passing Middle Standard exam. It is an exceptional project and has many typical features. It is designed to adjust the educational needs of rural women who are denied accessing the formal education because of social and financial constraints. Consequently, the course materials are designed and developed for the special needs of those women. Most of the courses are skill-oriented and are devised to the real-life needs of rural women.

In a study, Women Empowerment through Distance Education in Pakistan, Jumani, et al., (2013) found that AIOU is playing most considerable role in bridging the gender gap and creating consciousness in women through its educational programs. The ratio of women in AIOU is increasing regularly. The result is that women are taking more active role in improving the economy of Pakistan by means of employments. The constitution of Pakistan does not allow any distinction for getting education on gender bases.

1.1 Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study were;

1. To identify the role of AIOU in promoting education among rural women
2. To evaluate the role of tutors in promoting education among rural women

2. Review of Literature

Distance education is the process of teaching outside the traditional classroom setting or teaching students from a distance. Greenberg (1998) defines distance learning as a planned teaching/learning experience that uses a wide range of technologies to access learners at a distance and is devised to encourage learner interaction and certification of learning. Teaster and Blieszner (1999) say that the term distance education is applied to many instructional methods: however, its primary distinction is this ration of teacher and the learner with respect to space and time. Keegan(1995) states that distance education and training result from the technological separation of teacher and learner which liberates the student from the necessity of travelling to a fixed place, at a fixed time and to meet a fixed person for learning. From these definitions it is concluded that

in distance education students and teachers are separated by space and time. Thus, distance education is provided through videos and other means. Such instructions are the fastest growing means of distance learning. Distance learning (education) is a contemporary system of non-formal education. The different terms used for distance learning are Distance Education, Distance Teaching, Open Education, Open Learning etc. It is imparted through correspondence or postal courses, contact, electronic media like radio, television, video and audio cassettes etc. and other audio - visual aids.

The main features of distance education are that it is free from continuous and immediate supervision of teacher except the planning, guidance and tutorial organization. According to Ayyaz (2015) distance education is an educational process in which a significant proportion of teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner. This means that an intermediary is always used in the contact between tutor and student.

Initially distance education was through correspondence. In this regard Keegan (1986) described that the word correspondence was entirely associated with the written words, but due to utilization of media in education the term correspondence education was felt to be narrow. The term distance education was adopted in 1982 at the 12th world conference of international council for correspondence education at Vancouver, British Columbia. The council decided to change its name to “International Council for Distance Education”, thus giving international sanction to the use of term distance education. In the views of Holmberg (1988), “Distance education is education which either does not employ the physical presence of the teacher appointed to dispense it in the place where it is received or in which the teacher is present only one occasion or for selected tasks.

Distance education explores that learning depends on learners’ commitment to learn with the guidance and support of tutors and from learning material. According to Niazi (2000) the distance education is popular due to following characteristics:

1. The system is flexible and the students have more freedom for their learning as compared to their peers. Have more control over time, place and pace of their learning.
2. The support of technical media (print or non-print) makes the system more effective in teaching learning process.
3. The tutorial system of two-way communication bridges the gap of face-to-face component.
4. In service training is given effectively by using this system.
5. This system imparts education to various categories of people with different backgrounds and levels of education.
6. It provides opportunity of education to those who could not continue their education and want to improve their qualification.
7. The students learning from this system are pre-motivated.
8. It is helpful to improve the performance.

Distance education is suitable for most of students who are on job or cannot afford traditional universities due to low income or other restriction. It provides education for all and it is a lifelong learning system to receive higher education with lots of privileges that allows everyone to get education.

Niazi (2000) explores that realization of magnitude, complexity and pressure of the educational problem and economic mobility of different countries to fund the formal education system has compelled the education planners to explore the possibilities of unconventional methods, which would overcome the limitations of the formal educational system. This led the

countries to adopt distance education as one of the solutions to the situation. Distance education is continuously increasingly recognized as an alternative approach to solve the educational problems of learners. Provision of education is difficult due to the lack of time, money or energy, but only distance education is capable to solve these problems. In the third world countries, the conventional system of education is not suited due to lack of resources i.e. building, furniture and teaching staff etc. In these countries, it is needed to exchange the information to avoid wastage of efforts in provision of education. This need is fulfilled through distance education.

Distance education is a constant learning system and has many advantages over other existing systems of education. Kotur (2006) stated, “It may be considered a revolutionary development because it marked significant break from many centuries. Formal teaching system led to the development of an innovative multi-media teaching for learning system”. For the attainment of suitable advantages in a distance education system where students and educators are physically detached, technology is used to assist their interaction.

Distance education play a significant and active role in the attainment of education among the individuals of society. So, there are different role of distance education is as under:

1. It helps every person to utilize his capability.
2. Distance education is remarkably significant for working people to study and learn.
3. It essential to make educational system more effective and quantitative.
4. Role of distance education is very important in mobilizing women for full contribution in national development.
5. Distance education is also the best means to provide professional education for formal school leavers and adults.
6. Through distance education, people can improve their basic living skills and can become proficient in the basic techniques of their own special craft, trade and industry.

3. Research Methodology

The researchers used quantitative research method for the study that was descriptive in nature. The researchers used survey method for data collection. According to Gay (2000) descriptive research involves collecting data in order to test hypotheses or answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study. The study was designed to explore the role of Allama Iqbal Open University in promoting education among rural women in Southern Punjab. Researcher visited regional offices of Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad in Vehari and Bahawalpur districts. The total female students enrolled in semester Spring 2016 were 11154 and 5838 in the region of Vehari and Bahawalpur respectively. The number of rural female student is 5616 in Bahawalpur and 27711 in Vehari region. Number of tutors dealing with intermediate students is 307 in Bahawalpur region and 115 in Vehari region.

Table 1 Population, Sample and Response Return rate

Category	Population	Sample	Response rate
Students	8387	368	308 (84%)
Tutors	422	201	177 (88%)

The researcher developed two questionnaires; one for female students and other for tutors. The researchers distributed the questionnaire among 368 female rural students who are studying at intermediate level and 201 tutors in the Bahawalpur and Vehari region. The response rate of the questionnaires from rural female students and tutors were 308 (84%) and 177 (88%) respectively.

Pilot study was carried out to validate the desired questionnaires. The sample was comprised 5 tutors and 10 rural women from the region of Bahawalpur and Vehari. Necessary amendments and improvements were made on the basis of observations. The overall reliability of the questionnaire was Alpha 0.68 approx. Statistical techniques of frequency score, percentage score and mean score used for data analysis.

4. Data Analysis

Table 2 Students' Responses

S. No	Statement	Responses					M	D		
		A	S	A	C	U			A	D
1	Getting admission in AIOU is easy	79	2	5	2	2	0	2	.88	.65
		0.6	9	.2	8	.6	0	.6		
2	Got admission through advertisement in the newspaper.	37	1	47	1	1	2	1	.29	.53
		4.5	4	7.7	4	.6	3	.6		
3	The study material was received complete in all respect.	12	1	40	1	4	4	1	.10	.01
		6.6	3	5.4	4	3.3	1	.3		
4	The tutorial information was	9	9	30	1	2	3	6	.85	.87
		2.1	3	2.2	4	.4	9	1.1		

	received on time.								
5	The study material was easy to understand.	15 ¹	01 ¹	0 ⁴	4 ²	8 ²	.80 ³	.64 ²	
		7.3 ³	2.8 ³	3.0 ¹	.8 ⁷	.1 ⁹			
6	The study material has built-in activities in the text.	11 ¹	03 ¹	3 ⁵	6 ⁶	5 ³	.80 ³	.37 ³	
		6.1 ³	3.4 ³	7.2 ¹	.9 ¹	1.4 ¹			
7	The language of the study material was simple.	42 ²	4 ⁴	9 ⁹	0 ¹	3 ³	.70 ⁴	.85 ¹	
		8.6 ⁷	4.3 ¹	.9 ²	.2 ³	.0 ¹			
8	The study material involved the students into studies.	23 ¹	57 ¹	5 ¹	7 ⁷	6 ⁶	.20 ⁴	.76 ²	
		9.9 ³	1.0 ⁵	.9 ⁴	.3 ²	.9 ¹			
9	The appointment of tutors was made on merit.	04 ¹	12 ¹	4 ⁷	8 ⁸	0 ¹	.90 ³	.16 ³	
		3.8 ³	6.6 ³	4.0 ²	.6 ²	.2 ³			
10	Tutors are cooperative with the students during	00 ¹	41 ¹	0 ³	2 ²	5 ¹	.00 ⁴	.36 ²	
		2.5 ³	5.8 ⁴	.7 ⁹	.1 ⁷	.9 ⁴			

	the tutorials.								
11	Tutors are punctual in the study center.	20	08	7	6	7		.00	.01
		1	1	4	1	1	4		
12	Tutors give comments on students' assignments.	09	33	1	5	0		.00	.98
		1	1	4	1	1	4		
13	The assignments cover whole of the course during semester.	29	13	3	9			.20	.86
		1	1	4	1	4	1		
14	The students submit their assignments on time.	00	43	7	8	0		.00	.94
		1	1	3	1	1	3		
15	Tutors provide guidance to the students in their study difficulty.	2	42	8	3	3		.00	.84
		9	1	4	1	1	4		
		9.0	5.0	5.3	.2	.5			
		5.4	3.2	3.3	.9	.2			
		1.9	6.7	4.0	.1	.3			
		2.6	6.4	2.0	.8	.2			
		9.9	6.1	5.6	.2	.2			

Table 2 showed the frequency score, percentage score and mean score of students' responses regarding role of AIOU in promoting education among rural woman. The mean score goes from 3.8 to 4.88 and standard deviation from 0.65 to 3.37 that elaborate the perception of

female students. Majority of the respondents (115 + 101 = 216) agreed to the statement that the study material was easy to understand, the statement have the mean score (3.8). The mean score (4.2) of the statement indicated majority of the respondents (123 + 157 = 280) have the perception that the study material involved students in their studies. The mean score (4.88) indicated that majority of the respondents (279 + 25 = 304) have the view that getting admission in AIOU is easy. It is also indicated from the results that majority of the respondents (242 + 44 = 286) responded that the language of the study material was simple whereas the respondents (120 + 108 = 228) responded that tutors are cooperative with the students during tutorials. Regarding tutors feedback on their assignments, majority of the respondents (109 +133 = 242) responded that tutors give comments on their assignments regarding their performance. Regarding difficulties in their studies, majority of the respondents (92 + 142 = 234) responded that tutors provide guidance to the students in their studies.

Table 3 Tutors' Responses

Statement	Responses					M	SD
	S	A	U	D	SD		
The tutorship appointment information received on time.	12 0	53	1	0	3	.64	1.13
	67 .8	29 .9	0 6	0 0	1.7		
Tutorship file received from university is complete in all respect.	96	68	6	4	3	.44	.56
	54 .2	38 .4	3 4	2 3	1.7		
Students are informed about their tutors well in time.	10 9	57	8	1	2	.54	1.14
	61 .6	32 .2	4 5	0 6	1.1		
	90	74	7	5	1		

Tutorship file received from university is complete in all respect.	.8 50	.8 41	0 4.	8 2.	0.6	.4 4	25 2.
Students are informed about their tutors well in time.	9 10	57	8	1	2	.5 4	14 2.
	.6 61	.2 32	5 4.	6 0.	1.1		
The study material package was received in time.	90	74	7	5	1	.4 4	25 2.
	.8 50	.8 41	0 4.	8 2.	0.6		
Marked assignments are returned to the students well in time.	82	73	9	8	5	.2 4	78 2.
	.3 46	.3 41	1 5.	5 4.	2.8		
Students submit their assignments on time.	56	48	21	47	5	.6 3	45 3.
	.6 31	.1 27	.9 11	.6 26	2.8		
Tutors give useful comments on students' assignments.	54	3 10	12	6	2	.1 4	89 3.
	.5 30	.2 58	8 6.	4 3.	1.1		

Comments on assignments normally encourage the students.	76	84	11	4	2	.3	4	01	4.
	.9	42	.5	47	2				
The study material involved the students into studies.	76	80	16	3	2	.3	4	00	4.
	.9	42	.2	45	1				
Tutorial meetings provide opportunity to students to have interaction with their fellow students	82	73	16	3	3	.3	4	01	4.
	.3	46	.2	41	1				
Students are guided properly during tutorial meetings.	81	70	20	5	1	.3	4	94	3.
	.8	45	.5	39	.3				
Students' performance is improved through tutorial meetings	71	87	16	3	0	.3	4	98	3.
	.1	40	.2	49	0				
Tutors play vital role in promoting	99	57	11	7	3	.4	4	58	2.
	.9	55	.2	32	2				

female education							
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Table 3 showed the frequency score, percentage score and mean score of students' responses regarding role of tutor in promoting education among rural woman. The mean score goes from 3.6 to 4.6 and standard deviation goes from 1.13 to 4.01 that elaborate the perception of tutors for the education of female students. Majority of the respondents (56 + 48 = 104) agree to the statement that students submit their assignments on time, the statement have the mean score (3.6). The mean score (4.1) of the statement indicated majority of the respondents (54 + 103 = 157) have the perception that tutors give useful comments on students' assignments. The mean score (4.6) indicated that majority of the respondents (120 + 53 = 173) responded that the tutorship appointment information received on time and further informed the students. Majority of the tutors (82 + 73 = 155) responded that marked assignments of students are returned to the students well in time with comments. Regarding performance of female students, majority of the tutors (71 + 87 = 158) responded that students' performance is improved through tutorial meetings. Another interesting thing that is related to their fellow beings, majority of the tutors (82 + 73 = 155) responded that tutorial meetings provide opportunity to students to interact with their fellow students.

5. Findings and Conclusion

The study found that female students think got admission in AIOU is easy. Allied material for courses is easy to understand. The study material is designed in such a way that involved the students in their studies. The female students are inclined toward education because of the simple language used in the study material. Female students feel encouraged for education in AIOU when they observed that tutors have cooperative behavior with them. The study found when tutors provide guidance to the students in their studies to minimize the difficulties in their studies.

The study found that female students submit their assignments well in time. Feedback on their assignment by tutors also give encouragement to their studies. The study found that tutors have the perception that tutorship appointment information received on time and further they informed the relevant students as soon as possible. Furthermore, tutors returned students' marked assignments with comments well in time that created sense of further work in their studies. The study also found that tutorial meeting is a source of inspiration for female students in improving their performance in studies. Another important fact regarding AIOU for promoting education among female student is that tutorial meetings provide opportunities to the female students to interact with their fellow beings.

The study concluded that AIOU is playing a vital role for promoting female education in southern Punjab. To take admission is easy and simple conditions for admission. There is a cohesion and coherence in the design of allied material and its simple language. Cooperative behavior of tutors also inspires the female students in carrying out their further studies. Tutors active and conducive behavior is a great source of promoting female students' education in the country. Carr, Balasubramanian, Atieno and Onyango (2018) argue that beyond the formal education, lifelong learning needs to be placed in appropriate social and economic contexts to generate outcomes and impacts such as empowerment. The tutors are encouraging and motivating the female student in their education and studies through proper guidance and counseling. On the

other hand, female students submit their assignments and tutors provide feedback in the form of comments on assignments and returned them well in time, so that they may get guidance for the coming examination. The study further concluded that tutorial meeting improves female students' performance in their education. Tutors play an active role in tutorial meetings in promoting female education and in providing opportunities to interact female students with their fellows.

5.1 Recommendations

Some recommendations are devised to improve the role of AIOU in promoting education among female rural students. The recommendations are as under;

1. Attendance of tutors as well as rural female students may be made compulsory at study centres
2. There should be regular monitoring of tutorial programs

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