

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES OF THE DISTANCE UNIVERSITIES OF PAKISTAN

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### Abstract

*The study analyzed the mechanism of student support services of Allama Iqbal Open University and the Virtual University of Pakistan. The objectives of the study were, to analyze student support mechanism at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Pakistan and Virtual University(VU) of Pakistan and to compare the student support mechanism of both universities. The population of study was the students and sample comprised of 200 students from each university. The study was delimited to the students of Campus Rawalpindi/ Islamabad, Virtual University and Regional office Islamabad, Allama Iqbal Open University and session 2015-16. To achieve the objectives of study one questionnaire was developed for the students of both Universities, consisting of seven parts i.e. Admissions, Book delivery, Study centers/tutorials/laboratories, Guidance and counseling, Call center, University official website and Examination. Questionnaire was based on five point Likert scale and open ended questions. Data was collected through questionnaire from respondents of AIOU and VU of Pakistan. The data was collected through the questionnaire was tabulated and analyzed through calculating the percentage, mean score and t-test. The findings of the study have led the researchers to recommend that AIOU and VU should go for correspondence, online and blended distance learning (face to face and online learning). AIOU should provide computer labs to its students and introduce online learning system as it's the need of current era. VU should not rely solely on online video and lectures but should arrange regular workshops for students and face to face tutor tutorial meetings in every semester; Modern communication facilities like toll free phones, voice e-mail or auto answer should be provided at AIOU and VU campuses, both universities should establish Student Association and provide platform to students. In Assignments there should be given specific and encouraging remarks to ensure the improvement on part of the students.*

### 1. Introduction

Student Support Services (SSS) are a cluster of facilities and activities that are provided to make the learning process easier and more interesting for the learner. In distance education, they serve as the interface between the institution and the learner. The effective provision of these is now widely and increasingly being recognized as an essential component of any open and distance learning system. Tait (1995) has noted that, "there has been an enormous growth in interest and indeed institutional

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commitment even in times of financial constraint to student support in distance education and many examples in different countries of excellent practice....”The importance and necessity of the SSS have been highlighted by many authors, among whom Prideaux” (1989) observation is universally accepted. He maintained the view that “the quality of both the materials and the support systems are critical to the success of a distance learning system”. According to Croft (1991), “the goal of most support services is to help the student realize the instructional objective of the course by minimizing the negative effects of isolation and the lack of regular personal contact”. Sewart (1993) is constructive in stating that the SSS should be evolved in the context in which the system works. To him, the SSS must be constructed in the context of the almost infinite needs of the clients; are dependent on the educational ethos of the region and the institution; are dependent on the dispersal of the student body, elements of resource and the curriculum or product of the course production sub-system and are dependent on the generic differences in the student body which it has been set up to serve. He also maintains the view that student services in distance education are equated with customer service of an industrial enterprise. There exist clear differences in the nature, range, method of delivery and organization, and management of SSS from one institution to another. In particular, the nature of the distance teaching institution, i.e., whether dual or single mode has an influence on the provision, organization and management of SSS. For example, Croft (1991) noted that in dual mode institutions, the SSS tend to have a low status, the system is rarely geared to cope with the needs of adult students and the various functions are usually widely distributed, with little contact between the areas which could or should provide services. In these types of institutions, responsibility for decision making is so dispersed that there is no perception of the needs of distance students, no co-ordination and often very few real services available. In a study (Richard Siaciwena, 1996) observed that in a dual mode university in which distance education is not necessarily central to the activities of an institution, issues of co-ordination and decision making in the area of SSS are of paramount importance. Student Support Mechanism being operationalized by Distance Education Institutions in Pakistan is very important to be investigated. The Virtual University of Pakistan was established in 2002, over one hundred cities of the country with more than one hundred and ninety associated institutions providing infrastructure support to the students. Pakistani students residing overseas in several other countries of the region are also enrolled in the University's programs. The Virtual University student support services encompasses video lectures, reading material, digital library, labs, audio/video tutorials, website, face book, and on-line interaction (e-class rooms) for imparting knowledge. However, it follows a very formal assessment and evaluation system in the same fashion as used in any conventional higher education institution (HEI).

Although, the Virtual University of Pakistan observes the semester system, its students have complete flexibility to study at their own convenience, pace and place. More than 170 campuses of the University across Pakistan provide its students a great opportunity to participate in academic activities without any extra burden on their pockets as compared with those studying at home.

The University's video lectures are delivered through University's Learning Management System and its four free to air Television Channels (VTV1-4). Lectures

are also made available over the Internet on YouTube, Daily motion and the Virtual University's Open-Courseware site (<http://ocw.vu.edu.pk>). Although, the students can watch these video lectures at their own convenience, however the University suggests a “Time Plan” for guidance and better time management for studies during the semester. Students may also obtain the video lectures on DVDs from the University’s online bookshop.

Virtual University is Pakistan’s first University based completely on modern Information and Communication Technologies Using free-to-air satellite television broadcasts and the Internet, the Virtual University allows students to follow its rigorous programs regardless of their physical locations. The Allama Iqbal Open University was established in May, 1974, with the main objectives of providing educational opportunities to masses and to those who cannot leave their homes and jobs. The University with its main campus at Islamabad and huge network of regional centers spread all over the country is serving its clientele all over Pakistan and in the Middle East. AIOU is a Distance Education institution, which provides multi disciplinary education from basic to doctoral level programs. The university is part of the Ministry of Education/Higher Education Commission system and abides by the mutually agreed curricula. The university student support services consist of non-formal method of correspondence, tutorials, assignments, workshops, face to face teaching, radio and television broadcasts, library, special textbooks and reading materials prepared on self-learning basis, website, face book, part-time teachers (tutors) engaged nearest to the student's residences. And a system of regional offices and study centers for applied training is spread throughout Pakistan.

The present study might provide an efficient view and information to officers of Allama Iqbal Open University and the Virtual University of Pakistan about the use and advantages of student support services. It also assesses the availability, quality, worth and similarities of the student support services in different open universities. The study might be useful for Allama Iqbal Open University and the Virtual University of Pakistan to look into the quality of its student support services in the regions and in emphasizing the strengths and weaknesses in the student support services. It might enable the Allama Iqbal Open University and the Virtual University of Pakistan Regional Offices to overcome weaknesses and fulfill student needs and also provide guidelines for the rest of the Allama Iqbal Open University and the Virtual University of Pakistan Regional Offices in the country. It might be helpful for academicians, personnel’s of regional offices and policy makers in distance learning system to strengthen the students support services at Allama Iqbal Open University and the Virtual University of Pakistan. It might also suggest various measures for upgrading the student support services of Allama Iqbal Open University and the Virtual University of Pakistan.

## **2. Statement of Problem**

The present study was designed to analyze the student support mechanism of Allama Iqbal Open University and the Virtual University of Pakistan and compare them for better analysis of the services in both universities.

## **3. Objectives of the Study**

The study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyze student support mechanism at Allama Iqbal Open University Pakistan.

2. To analyze student support mechanism at Virtual University of Pakistan.
3. To compare the student support mechanism of Allama Iqbal Open University and Virtual University of Pakistan for better analysis of the services.

#### **4.Delimitations of the Study**

Due to limited resources on the part of researcher the study was delimited to:

- i. Allama Iqbal Open University and Virtual University of Pakistan
- ii. Campus Rawalpindi/ Islamabad, Virtual University
- iii. Regional office Islamabad, Allama Iqbal Open University
- iv. Students of the Virtual University of Pakistan
- v. Students of Allama Iqbal Open University Pakistan
- vi. Session 2015-2016

#### **5.Review of Related Literature**

Distance education is the most renowned descriptor used when referencing distance learning. It often describes the effort of providing access to learning for those who are geographically distant. Distance education has a history that spans almost two centuries (Spector, Merrill, Merrienboer, & Driscoll, 2008), and this time period represents significant changes in how learning occurs and is communicated.

From basic correspondence through postal service to the wide variety of tools available through the Internet, society has embraced new forms of communication through the years. One such form, online learning, is known to have a history of access beginning in the 1980's whereas another term, referred to as e-Learning, does not have its origins fully disclosed (Harasim, 2000). As researchers and designers utilized these emerging technologies, we find that a relaxed use of the terminology makes it difficult to design and evaluate similar learning environments without understanding the specific characteristics (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999). The design of different types of learning environments can depend on the learning objective, target audience, access (physical, virtual and/or both), and type of content. According to Alan Tait (2003), generally every learner is expected better support services from the institution where he has enrolled. The institution shall recognize the basic needs of the learners and try to fulfill them to the best of its abilities. The institutions should understand the effects of the learners when the needs are not fulfilled. The support services identified mainly in the fields of Establishment of Centres, Registration; Material Distribution; Library; Media; Examination & Evaluation for the distance learner community. Apart from this, the institution should ensure the availability of qualitative study materials before launching any programme of study.

##### **5.1. Services and Activities**

The services and activities involved are delineated below:-

###### **5.1.1. Establishment & Maintenance of Regional/Study Centres**

Locations should be identified geographically; the centers should be equipped with minimum educational infrastructural facilities. Technological facilities should be provided to the centres. Ensure that the centres should be managed in a purposeful manner.

###### **5.1.2 Information Services**

About Academic Programmes, Encourage prospective learners who desire to pursue their studies through distance mode.

To provide information about admission procedures and schedules,

About the distance education system and methodology including tutorials, counseling & assignment schedules, induction, library, tele-interactive sessions, dispatch of Course materials and Examination System.

#### **5.1.3 Pre-Admission Services**

The prospectus-cum-application forms for academic programmes should be made available to the prospective learner community at various places where these can be easily accessed by the learners. The information in respect of these programmes should be provided by various means such as posters, mailing, e-mailing and media. These documents should be made available to the learners at affordable prices.

#### **5.1.4. Post-Admission Services**

- Material Dispatch
- Library Services
- Examination & Evaluation Services
- Financial support
- Technological Services
- Media Services
- Other Services
  - Change of Address
  - Change of Electives
  - Change of Medium of Instruction
  - Processing of Credit Exemption requests
  - Inter-centre transfers
  - Issue of ID cards
  - Issue of Migration Certificate
  - Arrangement of contact programmes

#### **5.1.5. Material Dispatch**

- Procurement of stationery for dispatch of course materials
- Collection and storage of printed course materials
- Storing, packaging the materials
- Scheduling the distribution to avoid inconvenience to the learners Generating the address labels
- Collection and storage of audio/video programmes
- Distribution of printed materials, and audio/video programmes to the Regional Centers and Study Centers.
- Maintenance of records of course materials received, dispatched, etc.
- Updating the inventory
- Responding to learners' complaints about non-receipt of course materials

#### **5.1.6. Library Services**

- To develop appropriate collections in various disciplines to meet the needs of the clientele of the libraries of the University, Regional & Study Centers;
- To provide reading, lending, reference, information and documentation facilities to all categories of staff and students
  - To develop a special collection of distance education books and journals at the libraries
  - Circulation service including Inter Library Loan

- Reference & Referral
- User guidance
- Bibliographies/Indexes
- Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)
- CD-ROM search
- Microform search
- Online Databases
- Reprography
- Lamination & Spiral binding

#### **5.1.7. Examination and Evaluation Services**

- Preparation of guidelines for the conduct of examinations and evaluation of assignments.
- Conducting entrance tests for admission to programmes, wherever necessary.
- Selection of examination centers, appointment of paper setters and coordination of all work relating to the setting of question papers.
- Printing, storage and dispatch of question papers and answer books to examination centers.
- Arrangements for evaluation of answer scripts, scrutiny of the answer sheets and preparation of award lists.
- Processing of admissions to programmes involving test results, and maintenance of data on courses chosen by students, etc.
- Preparation of labels and lists of candidates admitted to various programmes.
- Evaluation of computer marked assignments and entering the scores in learners' grade cards along with the scores of Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs).
- Preparation of grade cards on the basis of the results of term-end examinations. • Processing of examination results.
- Dispatch of grade/result cards to students.
- Preparation of certificates/diplomas/degrees to be awarded to successful students.
- Consideration of the cases of the use of unfair means in examinations.
- Development of guidelines for assessment of assignments and printing of assessment sheets.
- Continuous assessment of students' performance through assignments and entering the awards in the students' records.
- Collection of project reports and their evaluation.
- Analysis of examination results.
- Development of new methods of assessment/evaluation.

#### **5.1.8. Financial Support**

Financial assistance to the needy learners in terms of subsidy in course fee and free course material, etc. may be provided as per the norms of the Institution.

#### **5.1.9. Technological Services**

- Set up & Maintenance of Computer Laboratories
- Introduction of Menu-driven training programmes
- Web hosting, development and maintenance
- Providing Networking facilities at Centers



- Providing ICT resources

#### **5.1.10. Media Services**

- Production of audio/video programmes;
- Arranging Teleconferencing sessions,
- Interactive radio counseling sessions
- Conduct of Induction Programmes through tele-conferencing mode.

#### **5.1.11. Change of Medium, Electives and Programme**

As part of the flexibility, the learners after having registered once, they may be given a facility to change the subjects and medium of instruction. Such requests shall be processed by the staff as per the provisions made by the institution

#### **5.1.12. Issue of Identity Cards**

The ID cards are issued to the learners, which can be used for availing library facilities, attending classes and other purposes

#### **5.1.13. Migration Certificate**

Migration Certificate is issued to the learners who have completed the academic programme from the institution

#### **5.1.14. Arrangement of Contact Programmes**

The counseling schedules and teleconferencing schedules are to be prepared and sent to the learners. Audio/Video and Computer facilities are also to be arranged simultaneously during the tutorial sessions.

### **5.2. Organizational Structure of AIOU**

Allama Iqbal Open University was established under an Act of the Parliament in 1974 under the administrative control of Federal Ministry of Education of Pakistan with the name of People's Open University (Act No XXXIX of Parliament of Pakistan, 1974). Its principal seat is at Islamabad with a viable network of Regional Campuses/ Centers throughout the country. Its name was changed to Allama Iqbal Open University in 1977 in commemoration of 100th Birth Anniversary of Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal (Research and Evaluation Centre, Triennial Report, AIOU 1972-80). It was the first distance learning university in Asia and the second to come up in the world. Its slogans are CONTINUING EDUCATION AND EDUCATION FOR ALL. Its purpose is to impart education to the masses of Pakistan at their door-steps through print and electronic media (books, readers, study guides and radio/TV programmes etc) without any discrimination of age, sex or creed. Now, taking idea from the success of the UKOU and the AIOU, many Open Universities has been established in different countries like India, Sri Lanka, China, Canada, Korea, Bangladesh, Japan, Thailand, etc. in a sense, the Allama Iqbal Open University is the fore-runner of all these open universities. In 1976, the university started off with a few courses of Arabic, a Primary Teachers Orientation Course and Foundation Courses, with nine regional offices in the country. On the request of the government, it started Teacher Education Programmes like PTC/CT/ATTC for training and orientation of the untrained teachers working in different government schools (Research and Evaluation, AIOU 1999). Later on, the range of its teacher education programmes was extended up to B. Ed (General), B. Ed (Arabic), M.A. Education, M. Ed (in four disciplines), M.A EPM, Diploma TEFL, M.A TEFL and M. Phil (in four disciplines). To cater to the needs of the businesses community, the university

started Bachelor and Master's Degree Programmes in Business Administration (MBA and BBA) through distance learning system, subsidized by the government. Recently, Business Administration and Computer Programmes have been started and face to face instruction/ teaching is provided at the approached study center.

### **5.3. Regional Network of Allama Iqbal Open University**

The headquarters of the university is based at Islamabad; its services are provided to the masses through the Directorate of Regional Services at the main campus and its network of regional campuses, and regional centers have been established in various parts of the country. The booklet on Regional Services (1976) of Allama Iqbal Open University highlighted the Regional Services network as:

“The Allama Iqbal Open University regional services network became operative in 1976 when the university planned to establish its offices in all the four provinces starting from Multan, in November and at Quetta, Karachi in December 1976. In March 1977 two more offices were established at Peshawar and Mirpur (AJK). In October 1977, Lahore office was established. This figure gradually raised to 9 in 1981, 14 in 1985 and at present 28 regular regional offices and 20 part time regional coordinating offices are operating.”

The beneficiaries of AIOU are spread over from the seashores of Karachi to the heights of Himalayan Mountains like Siachin and far flung areas of Chitral i.e. Wah Khan near Tajikistan borders (Central Asia States). The range of services provided by the regional centers are of all levels, from basic through secondary, intermediate, bachelor, master, M.Phil and Ph.D. It includes general, vocational, technical and research field at pursuit opted by the enrollees – male, female, rural or urban alike.

Allama Iqbal Open University report 1985–88 (p.165) indicates the regional services as:

Being a distance learning institution the regional services meet the essential purpose of instructional support, information and advice for the student who may be under reads of kilometers from the main campus. The regional services comprises of directorate at the campus mainly responsible for the policy and coordination of activities carried out by a network of regional offices/ sub-regional offices/personal coordinating offices and part time regional coordinating offices.

Special emphasis at AIOU regional services is being paid currently to the following activities in Allama Iqbal Open University Report 1997–99 (1999, p.7) as:

- Establishing of sub-regional coordinating offices in remote areas.
- Training of newly recruited offices.
- Establishment of libraries in regional offices.
- Appointment of senior tutors with particular reference to monitoring of tutors performance.
- Improvements in model study centers.
- Consolidation of physical facilities in regional and construction of regional campuses.
- Strengthening of regional centers to provide better services.
- To computerized the regional centers for better record keeping and solving student problems at local levels.



- To network regional centre with the computer centre, main campus using internal or provide e-mail or fax to expedite transfer of student data to the regional centre and fast communication.

Regional campuses play an important role in distance education. Regional directors identify the experts in the region in all the disciplines. They appoint tutors from these experts for each group of students. The director also arranges collaboration with sister institutions and registers them as study centers. They organize workshops and practical training in the region. Opportunities for personal contact in distance education course are linked in face-to-face session, which are helpful to the students. It improves the quality of answer and increasing the frequency of student assignments.

Report of the Allama Iqbal Open University 1999–2000 (2000, p.109) indicated the tutorial support services as: tutorials are arranged at local study centers through part time tutors numbering around 7000 per semester. These tutors belong to local educational institutions and provide guidance/counseling to the students besides evaluation of their assignments. The university has by now established over 780 study centers where tutorials are held as per study schedule. 70 of these study centers are equipped with audio-visual aids in each semester apart from arranging internship for each student at the end of the final semester.

In distance education, support services are organized and managed on the concept of local centers and study centers. Study centers are generally carry out one or more of their functions, academic, advisor and administrative.

#### **5.4. Organizational Structure of Virtual University of Pakistan**

The University opened its virtual doors in 2002 and in a short span of time its outreach has reached over one hundred cities of the country with more than one hundred and ninety associated institutions providing infrastructure support to the students. Pakistani students residing overseas in several other countries of the region are also enrolled in the University'. The Virtual University, Pakistan's first University based completely on modern Information and Communication Technologies, was established by the Government as a public sector, not-for-profit institution with a clear mission: to provide extremely affordable world class education to aspiring students all over the country. Pakistan's first University based completely on modern Information and Communication Technologies Using free-to-air satellite television broadcasts and the Internet, the Virtual University allows students to follow its rigorous programs regardless of their physical locations. It thus aims at alleviating the lack of capacity in the existing universities while simultaneously tackling the acute shortage of qualified professors in the country. By identifying the top Professors of the country, regardless of their institutional affiliations, and requesting them to develop and deliver hand-crafted courses, the Virtual University aims at providing the very best courses to not only its own students but also to students of all other universities in the country. The Virtual University of Pakistan holds a Federal Charter, making its degrees recognized and accepted all over the country as well as overseas. Vision of the university is To become an internationally acclaimed technology based university that improves access to higher education while maintaining the highest quality standards. Mission of the university is:

- To provide the highest quality of education and research opportunities to all aspiring students irrespective of their age, gender, religion, and geographical location by using modern ICT with content developed by top experts of their respective fields.
- To train students to grow in their professional lives and inculcate an entrepreneurial mindset with high ethical and moral standards to become a productive part of society. To provide the best working environment to faculty and staff to create a culture of research, innovation and cooperation.
- To promote the philosophy of knowledge sharing by providing free and unhindered access to all of its educational content.

#### **5.4.1 Administrative Structure**

- Other Officers of the University include:
- Registrar
- Deans
- Chairpersons or Heads of the Teaching Departments
- Director Finance
- Controller of Examinations
- Director of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

The Board of Governors is the apex body of the University, responsible for the general supervision and control of administrative, academic and financial affairs, to lay down the policies and statutes.

- Other Authorities of the University include:
- Executive Council
- Academic Council
- Board of Studies
- Advanced Studies and Research Board
- Selection Board
- Finance and Planning Council
- Affiliation Committee

#### **5.4.2. Mode of Education at VU**

The Virtual University uses a combination of video lectures, reading material, audio/video tutorials and on-line interaction (e-class rooms) for imparting knowledge. However, it follows a very formal assessment and evaluation system in the same fashion as used in any conventional higher education institution (HEI). More than 170 campuses of the University across Pakistan provide its students a great opportunity to participate in academic activities although, the University observes the semester system, its students have complete flexibility to study at their own convenience, pace and place.

More than 170 campuses of the University across Pakistan provide its students a great opportunity to participate in academic activities without any extra burden on their pockets as compared with those studying at home. The wide spread of virtual campuses and complete flexibility to study at home jointly support the unique idea of “World Class Education at YourDoorstep” and in a true sense makes it unnecessary for students to relocate or travel to larger cities to obtain higher education.

The University's video lectures are developed by highly qualified faculty members or field experts in a complete digital environment and handcrafted at its own fully equipped recording studios. These lectures are then delivered through University's Learning Management System and its four free to air Television Channels (VTV1-4). Lectures are also made available over the Internet on YouTube, Daily motion and the Virtual University's Open-Courseware site (<http://ocw.vu.edu.pk>). Although, the students can watch these video lectures at their own convenience, however the University suggests a "Time Plan" for guidance and better time management for studies during the semester. Students may also obtain the video lectures on DVDs from the University's online bookshop.

Complete student-teacher interaction and support is provided through the VULMS while semester examinations are conducted in a formal, proctored environment at designated examination centers throughout the country.

### 6. Methodology

Cross sectional survey design was employed for this study and it was a descriptive/ survey as well as desk analysis based on qualitative and quantitative methods. Convenient sampling technique was employed as given in the table to collect the data from the students of the both universities.

### 7. Population and Sample

S. No	Category	Sample	Sampling Technique
1	Students of AIOU	200	Convenient sampling
2	Students of VU	200	Convenient Sampling

After review of the literature, one questionnaire was developed which was used for the students of Allama Iqbal Open University Pakistan and Virtual University of Pakistan. The questionnaire was prepared on 5 point likert scale and some open ended questions. Students were contacted during workshops, examination, library and campuses to fill the questionnaire.

### 8. Analysis and Interpretation

Serial	Statements	Mean score AIOU	Mean score VU	t-value	Sig. value
1	Announcement of admissions are made on social and print media in every semester	4.24	4.64	-10.528	.000
2	Admission forms are easily available at nearest places/ Banks, Study centres	4.58	4.82	-3.569	.000
3	Admission forms can be downloaded from Official Website of University easily	4.24	4.70	-6.420	.000

4	Fee depositing system is easy	3.88	3 . 8 4	-10.42	.000
5	Regional office/Campus gives instant response	4.24	4 . 1 8	.576	.000
6	Study material is sent timely	3.87	4 . 3 8	-5.115	.000
7	Study material is sent to homes	4.22	4 . 2 0	0.295	.768
8	The study material is self-explanatory	4.00	3 . 1 6	2.324	.021
9	Lectures/videos on official website of University and social media are available	3.48	4 . 6 1	-11.56	.000
10	Course material is available in print form	4.62	4 . 5 2	1.593	.112
11	Tutors are easily available on phone or mail	4.18	3 . 6 8	4.097	.000
12	Tutors remarks on assignments are available	3.98	4 . 3 6	-4.072	.000
13	Tutors names and particulars are conveyed in time	4.18	4 . 5 6	-4.617	.000
14	Tutors attend tutorial meetings regularly	3.31	1 . 6 8	16.335	.000
15	Workshops/lab sessions are in evening	4.09	1 . 7 2	29.209	.000

16	Workshops/lab sessions timings are suitable	4.06	1 . 6 2	26.23	.000
17	Adequate A.V aids are available at the study centres	3.85	4 . 5 7	-7.21	.000
18	Workshops/lab sessions are arranged at approachable places near homes	4.02	4 . 1 6	-1.287	.199
19	Library is helpful to complete assignments and research work	3.95	4 . 0 0	-0.362	.718
20	Online library is available	3.43	4 . 1 8	-6.852	.000
21	Guidance and counseling services are offered	3.98	4 . 2 7	-2.643	.009
22	Counselors can be approached easily	3.36	3.63	-1.929	.054
23	Call centres are available and they respond timely	3.53	4.38	-8.174	.000
24	University official Website is informative	4.13	4.36	-2.434	.015
25	Date sheet for exams is very convenient	4.28	4.51	-2.769	.006
26	Examination halls are well equipped. Have proper lighting, furniture, heaters, fans, water etc	3.83	4.10	-2.322	.01
27	Roll number slip can be downloaded from University Official website	3.92	4.50	-6.143	.000
28	Results are uploaded on University website	4.72	4.50	4.200	.000
29	Successful Students in exams receive Degrees and Certificates at home address	3.54	2.02	14.572	.000

### 9. Findings

Student support services regarding admissions VU online system were speedy and well organized than AIOU. AIOU and VU campuses gave instant response to their students means worth of services in this regard of both universities are same. VU sent study material on time usually reason was it had online system they sent soft copies to students on time while AIOU used postal services so at times its students complained. AIOU books were self explanatory but not revised or updated while VU books were updated but bit tough for students to grasp the concepts. Lectures/videos/ on official website of VU University and social media were available while AIOU lacked it. AIOU usually sent course books in print form at home addresses of students

through postal services which at times delayed while VU uploaded or sent books in the form of soft copies on time, secondly if students needed books in print form they can bought from nearby campuses. Tutors of AIOU were usually available on phone and respond quickly but VU students had to wait emails of their tutor. VU Tutors remarks on assignments were always available while AIOU students lack it and usually they didn't get their assignments back after being checked. Tutors of AIOU attended tutorial meetings regularly while VU had no such service for its students. Workshops sessions were arranged by AIOU regarding different programmes in evening for students in every semester while VU lacked it. AIOU and VU both arranged Workshops/lab sessions at approachable places near student's home. AIOU and VU both had given online library to its students, but VU students used it frequently. Guidance and counseling services were offered by both universities but VU performance was better than AIOU. VU Call centers respond timely. VU University official Website was more informative than AIOU. VU examination services were better than AIOU services.

#### **10.Conclusions**

AIOU and VU of Pakistan both were doing their level best in giving enhanced student support services to their students. Sufficient number of students of AIOU and VU of Pakistan were satisfied with the provided students support services. AIOU was following correspondence distance learning while VU was following online distance learning. However there were few flaws in both universities student support services. VU followed online system strictly which was good no doubt as its 21st century but unfortunately, students were not ready for this system, rather students were in need of workshops conducted for all programs in every semester plus they needed tutor student meetings, face to face meeting with their lecturers and professors, platform for students meetings, in short students needed to be more in touch with teachers, students and administration. They complained a lot about being in isolation. Lectures and videos of programs were uploaded by VU regularly but they were more passive and uninteresting there was system of asking questions regarding lectures through e- mails from tutors but it couldn't fulfilled the demand of teachers. Few students suggested for transport service, canteen, and decrease in fee. AIOU followed correspondence distance learning and was dealing with over one million students. AIOU sent text books, assignments, tutors particulars, workshop schedules, roll number slips, date sheets, DMS, results, degrees, admission slips for next semester etc through postal services plus it uploads all this information on its official website too. AIOU no doubt did a great job but it had few setbacks major setback was it hardly revised or updated its course books, books were not written for distance learners, printing of books and its material was of very low standard, teachers at workshops were not very proficient, online e learning was demand of few students particularly submission of online assignments, course books, lectures and videos of different course programmes needed to be uploaded on official website, transport service, fee structure to be revised, scholarships for students, hygienic canteens.

#### **11.Recommendations**

1. VU should arrange workshops for its students in every semester for all kind of programmes, should make its lectures and videos more interesting by adding visuals and illustrations., should arrange tutor student meetings in every semester., should



provide transport and canteens at all campuses and reconsider its fee structure for needy students.

2. AIOU should revise and update its courses where they are needed and must be written particularly for distance learners, AIOU should improve the quality of printing and paper of its books, AIOU should appoint lecturers for workshops on merit, particularly those with experience of teaching adults, Online e learning should be introduced, Scholarships, transport services, hygienic canteens should be provided, Fee structure should be reconsidered for deprived students.

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