

DUAL MODE OFFERING AS VIABLE APPROACH FOR PROMOTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan is a developing with 148 universities and degree awarding institutions including public and private sector. The enrolment as given in the National Educational Policy 2009 was up to 5% only. It reflects greater demands of higher/tertiary education and calls for alternative strategic measures for addressing the issue. An innovative approach was necessary to address the issue of access. Therefore, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur –a formal mode university took an innovative initiative to become a dual mode university by establishing an Institute of Distance Education (IDE) in 2011.

The institute offered along with others, an M.Phil programme in ten disciplines through distance education mode in semester fall 2011. More than eight hundred applications were received by potential learners against 275 seats.

However, after test and interview 189 students were enrolled in M.Phil programme in Applied Psychology, Arabic, Education, English, Media Studies, Islamic Studies, Pakistan Studies, History, Persian, and Urdu. In the beginning, the Institute organized an orientation workshop for learners to guide them studying in distance education system. The programme was offered under semester system and the semester was broke up into two halves –mid-term and final term.

The respective departments provided learning materials to students whereas the IDE provided instructional booklet. Submission of two assignments was compulsory for the entire semester; one before mid-term and second before final-term workshop/examination for each of the courses. Similarly, students' presence in workshops for 24 hours (12 during mid-term and 12 during final-term workshop) for one 3-credit hour course was mandatory. Students' support services were provided through Skype conference, social media and mobile phones. Students necessarily had to give presentations and submit their assignments after checking their similarity index by using turnitin software.

At the end of the course work the instructors rated performance of learners' to be good. Learner's appeared to be enthusiastic for continuing their studies. The experience appeared to be a milestone in promoting higher education and feasible for replication at larger scale in Pakistan. The process and procedures; achievements; and problems, issues and challenges were discussed paper to be presented during the conference. The detailed experience will be shared during the conference.

Keywords: Dual Mode University, Educational Technology, Distance Education, Viable Approach, Learning Experience

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is a developing country with ever increasing demands and fewer opportunities of higher education. About 148 universities and degree awarding institutions; both in public and private sector are catering needs of higher education of about twenty five million youth of 18-23 years' age group.

The National Education Policy (2009) of Pakistan estimated the participation rate up to 5% in these tertiary education institutions. Keeping in view this context of higher education in Pakistan, Hussain, Adeb, Safdar & Rahmani, (2008) asserted that the remaining thousands of young boys and girls cannot get into tertiary education institutions due to different reasons like poverty, lack of access opportunities, social norms and values etc. It calls for an alternate strategy to bring such individuals into main stream higher education.

Keeping in view the intensity of the problem, the government of Pakistan took an innovative initiative and restructured the University Grants Commission (UGC) as Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2002 to standardize higher education in Pakistan. Similarly, the virtual university (VU) of Pakistan was also established as an innovative higher education institution based on technology for promotion of tertiary education throughout the country at par with international standards.

Nonetheless, following HEC initiatives, the enrolment in all higher education institutions had increased to over 1100,000 students in 2011-12 from 600,000 students in 2006-07 and 475,000 in 2002 academic year (Hussain & Reza, 2010).

The situation indicates that the formal education cannot cope with the demands of higher education of the masses. Distance education may be linked to the issue of access to education in the country. It provides freedom to learn to all individuals of the country on their own pace, place and choice (Rashid, 2002). Distance education emerged in response to the need of providing access to those who would otherwise not be able to participate in face-to-face (f2f) courses.

DUAL MODE UNIVERSITIES

The universities offering their programmes of study through distance education mode and as well as on-campus are called dual-mode universities. Usually, dual mode universities use the same curriculum for a programme being offered in both of the modes. The same measures are taken into account while assurance quality for both of the programmes.

Different universities of the world are offering their programmes through distance education mode becoming dual mode universities. These are progressive universities and embrace innovations for accommodating higher education needs of learners. Some of such universities are The University of South Australia (<http://www.unisa.edu.au/etd/teach.asp>); Massey University (New Zealand) (<http://extramural.massey.ac.nz/welcome.htm>); The University of the South Pacific (<http://www.usp.ac.fj/dfl/dflvision.htm>); The University of the West Indies (<http://www.dec.uwi.edu/>); The University of British Columbia (Canada) (<http://det.cstudies.ubc.ca/>); The University of Leicester (UK) (<http://www.le.ac.uk/>) and The University of Delhi (India) (http://sol.du.ac.in/About%20Us/about_sol.htm).

In Uganda Makerere University turned into a dual mode university by offering Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) and Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com) in 1991 through distance education or external mode. The distance education programmes were offered aiming to increase University intake in some courses which meet urgent national needs; extend universal education; and extend use of University resources to eligible and interested people who could not pursue full-time courses and programmes at the University campus. Similarly, Thompson Rivers University Canada is a Dual-Mode University with 10,000 on campus; more than 16,000 distance education students and having enrolment of more than 1200 International Students from 70 countries of the world. The university offers about 100 programs in different disciplines including certificate level programmes to diploma, undergraduate and masters' level programmes with 400 specialized distance education courses.

According to Allen and Seaman (2003) 81% of all higher education institutions in USA at least offered one online or blended course; 34% offered complete online degree programmes and among public institutions 97% of institutions offered one on-line course with 49% offering at least one on-line programme. Following the same academic lines University of Southern Queensland (USQ) is one of the innovative dual mode universities in Australia. Taylor (2004) argued for the dual mode education by asserting that the present (in 2004) traditional approaches based on conventional classroom teaching and learning and a hierarchical, bureaucratic academic structure would not be capable of meeting the escalating demand for higher education in the knowledge society, and that universities must therefore adapt or face the fate of the dinosaurs.

According to Moore (2000) the University of Wisconsin has started outreach/external teaching to enhance educational opportunities for people of the state (<http://www.uwex.edu/about/history>). Massey University enrolls 50% of its students in distance education programmes for which commitment of its faculty is high as individual academics assumed leading role in planning, drafting, delivering, assessing and examining their extra-mural courses (Prebble, 2005). The University of the West Indies (UWI) became a dual-mode university in 1992 by offering its programmes by conventional and distance education modes (Tau, 2006).

In India, Annamalai University is a dual Mode university and its directorate of distance education conducts various programmes through its study Centers located throughout the country. Similarly, the University of Delhi is another example of dual-mode University in India having more than 65% of total enrollment in higher education at School of Open Learning (SOL); and 35% are enrolled in affiliated conventional mode colleges (Pokhriyal, 2011). Likewise, The success story of the University of Phoenix seems a motivating agent for higher education institutions in imparting education through distance and on-campus modes; to becoming dual mode universities. It has been using technology for offering distributed face-to-face courses in networked campuses and online tutor-mediated learning through the University of Phoenix on-line, by launching Flexnet, "the Online Education with class" (<http://www.phoenix.edu/virtualtour>).

DUAL MODE UNIVERSITIES IN PAKISTAN

Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Islamabad is pioneer distance education institution in South Asia and the only mega university of Pakistan which is based on the philosophy of 'education for all' and questing for the promotion of higher education.

The increasing population demands more opportunities and facilities of higher education in the country (Hussain, Adeeb, Safdar & Rahmani, 2008).

Apparently, viable strategies need to be incorporated for meeting the needs of higher education of people of Pakistan. As strategic step, the formal universities started offering their programmes through distance education by becoming dual-mode universities. These universities are promoting access to higher education to those who are otherwise unable to attend regular on-campus classes. Almost all general universities of Pakistan either have started offering their programmes through distance education or are planning to embrace it for becoming dual-mode universities. The number of dual-mode universities is increasing currently including University of the Punjab, Bahaudin-Zakariya University, University of Sargodha, Government College University Faisalabad, University of Sindh Hyderabad, Karachi University Karachi, COMSATS Islamabad (have launched Virtual Campus), Gomal University Dera Ismail Khan and the Islamia University of Bahawalpur.

THE ISLAMIA UNIVERSITY OF BAHAWALPUR, PAKISTAN –A FORMAL UNIVERSITY

The Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB) has a long history in knowledge production and its dissemination in the Subcontinent. It has proved its identity as a hub of knowledge; by catering educational needs of the people since 1925 as Jamia Abbasia. The IUB was granted charter as a public sector university in 1975 and now it is becoming a progressive university. As one of the Pakistan's leading universities, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur has recognition not only at local and national levels, but also globally. The IUB academia collaborates with partners worldwide to advance knowledge and address challenges of international importance in diverse areas such as medicine, engineering, teacher education, art & design, biochemistry & biotechnology and the environmental sciences.

The IUB is a progressive institution of higher education and embraces emerging technologies and modern trends for preparing its graduates to live and work successfully in global perspective. It aims at developing communities and therefore, offers innovative programmes. The establishment of the Institute of Distance Education (IDE) is a mile stone in higher education. Its academic enterprises and research endeavors are driven by curiosity for making a difference through outcome-oriented approach. Research at IUB in both basic and applied sciences considers fundamental questions of the area. It addresses major challenges of society, such as climatic change, healthcare, peace and harmony, social justice and social change, media & technology and teacher education and training.

INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION –A STEP FORWARD

The 21st century is called the century of innovations and inventions. These innovations & inventions appeared to bring about unprecedented changes in all human endeavors including education and training. Usually, education is seen an integrated constituent of overall development of a country and innovations multiply its efficacy. Therefore, embracing innovations and inventions seems quite justifiable to catering educational needs of the 21st century learners. Adoption of new approaches and innovative modes of delivery appeared in new forms and formats leading towards distance education, virtual education and e-learning. Distance education is innovative but simple mode of imparting education by enhancing opportunities of education for all. Bahawalpur is a socially conventional, geographically remote and academically low literate region of Pakistan. It has scarce educational opportunities particularly, higher/ tertiary education.

The people living here in rural areas face difficulties in getting into university for higher education due to fewer facilities and lesser opportunities of higher education. Reluctance among people in sending their females to big cities for their higher education is a notable characteristic of this region.

It calls for an alternate but viable strategy to catering educational needs of the people of this region. Justifiably, offering higher education programmes through distance education approach along with on-campus classes can address the issue appropriately.

The Islamia University of Bahawalpur is serving a huge population and larger community of the region. Keeping in view pressing demands of higher education and fewer opportunities; the Islamia University of Bahawalpur took an innovative and visionary step and established an 'Institute of Distance Education (IDE)' on March 15, 2011 with the objectives to;

- impart quality education to all on their own paces and places
- empower the people of Bahawalpur with the power of knowledge through technology
- extend educational opportunities of learning while earning to those who cannot leave their jobs and homes
- promote a culture of service learning in the region particularly and country generally
- provide people a second chance of education
- develop a linkage with media and higher education institutions particularly distance education institutions - national & international
- prepare individuals to live and work in the 21st century with new vision and charter
- make best use of available resources and impart skill based-knowledge

The establishment of IDE is in accordance with the vision 2025 –that all universities of the world will be offering all or some of their educational programmes through distance education mode by adopting emerging technologies, and guaranteeing the right to education.

VISION OF INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

We are committed to provide education to all at all places for making Pakistan a better place to live and work in the 21st century. The modern technologies such as cell phones, internet, audio and video-conferencing and other satellite links and other technological resources are used for effective learning and to bring about horizontal and vertical expansion in the field of education. Various higher education institutions in world have started Open and Distance Learning (ODL) to make their educational programs accessible to the people of the world. The educational planners have sufficient reasons to believe that the brick university will be replaced by Click University by the year 2025. Foreseeing the future trends and needs of educational community, the Vice chancellor of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur has envisioned the Institute of Distance Education.

MISSION OF INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

The Institute of Distance Education intends to make a history of preparing professional educators for the Bahawalpur Region and Pakistan.

The institute is committed to promote a culture of learning by providing educational opportunities to all.

The quest is to foster a culture of research, reflective practice and inquiry within a diverse community of learners to make them assume leadership role in the society.

Developing Courses and Offering Programmes

Each of the departments offering its programmes through distance education prepared and implemented scheme of studies of each programme according to guidelines provided by Higher Education Commission, Pakistan and adopted by the IUB.

The scheme of studies was formally approved by committee of courses and board of studies of the respective department and academic council of IUB before implementation and offering.

The same courses were offered to distance learners and on-campus students for the same programme(s) following the same rules and regulations of admission, instruction (contact hours), and assessment of the university. Nevertheless, the following process was adopted for course development and offering to learners.

- The Programme coordinator (usually a faculty member) conceived titles of the courses of the respective programme(s) in consultation with chairperson of the department. The same were presented and discussed in committee of courses and finalized.
- The course coordinator (generally a faculty member) designed outlines of respective course(s) and selected contents. The contents were also presented to discuss and finalized by committee of courses and later on Board of Studies (BOS). The course coordinators designed activities for learners' along with procedure of assessing their learning achievement according to the objectives of respective the course and programme.
- Committee of courses (usually consisting of chairmen/head of respective department, programme coordinator, course coordinator and two senior faculty members of respective department) reviewed titles of the courses, their outlines and proposed contents. It also reviewed activities designed for learners and assessment procedure of learners' achievement for individual course(s).
- Board of Studies, according to rules & regulations of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur reviewed titles of courses of different programmes; outlines, contents, activities and assessment procedures for each of the course according to nature and need of individual course. The same (with amendment if any) were recommended for approval of the Academic Council of the IUB.
- Academic Council according to the rules and regulations of IUB approved course of study. After approval of the Academic Council, the respective department offered programmes and courses through distance education under the Institute of Distance Education.
- Each of the course coordinator was entrusted responsibility of preparing course book/study guide/course guide. It included course outlines, handouts and detailed contents, activities, assignments – 1 and 2, schedule of submission of assignments, guidelines on writing assignments and final getting through examination.

Admission of Students

Admission Criteria

As same programmes are offered to both of the clientele –on-campus and distance learners; therefore same criteria of admission is adopted for the two types of learners. All the programmes and courses are prepared and offered according to the guidelines and criteria as envisaged by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan. The IDE adopts semester system as implemented by the university.

Instructional Delivery & Assessment Criteria

The respective course coordinators selected relevant materials from Internet, and library. They compiled the same in the form of a guide book to offering to learners.

The instructional materials were provided to learners were in both hard (binding form) and soft (compact diskettes-CDs) forms containing lectures/presentations and contents of each course.

The selected lectures were planned to upload on the university/ Institutes' website for open access of learners. The following process was adopted for imparting instruction and evaluation of their learning achievement.

- Instructional delivery is one of the basic inputs to achieving learning objectives of a programme and a course. The IDE adopted a blended approach (face-to-face and home study) for instructional delivery of the courses. It also used educational technology like Skype and other social media for enhancing interactions of learners with faculty and their fellows.
- The learners studied instructional material at their homes through self-study approach and completed self-assessment activities and assignments assigned by their respective tutors. It developed analytical approach and critical thinking along with inculcating communication skill among learners.
- Distance learners were required to complete at least two assignments for each of the courses. However, the number of assignments varied depending upon the nature and objectives of course(s) offered.
- Workshops were mandatory components and provided f2f interactions in classroom situation. The main topics of the courses were discussed during f2f sessions of the workshops accompanying individual presentations by the learners. It developed sense of belongingness among learners and enhanced their presentation skills.
- As IUB adopts semester system, therefore, IDE semester system too for imparting instruction and evaluating learning achievement of learners. The learning achievement of distance learners was evaluated through mid-term examination (30%), final term examination (50%) and assignments/presentations (20%) followed by compulsory workshops for each of the courses.

Group Workshops –Enhancing F2f Interactions Among Distance Learners

The IDE organized compulsory workshops to enhance and facilitate (F2F) interactions of learners in classroom situation at the campus. The IDE organized following workshops for learners.

Orientation Workshop

- The IDE organized one-day orientation workshop in beginning of the programmes. It introduced learners with university, its facilities and rules and regulations. The respective programme and course coordinators explained programme course outlines and mandatory criteria for getting through the respective programme and course accordingly. It developed understanding about distance education system and requirements of the scheme of studies, facilities and opportunities at the IUB and IDE.
- ***Mid-Semester Workshop***
- As IDE adopted semester system, therefore, a semester was divided into two halves. The first half consisted of seven to eight weeks after the orientation workshop. After the 7-8 weeks the department organized two days (6 contact hours daily) for each course according to schedule prepared by IDE.
- ***Final-Semester Workshop***
- Similarly, after 15-16 weeks of the orientation workshop or 7-8 weeks after mid-term workshop again the respective department organized two days (6 contact hours daily) for each course according to schedule rotated by IDE.

During the mid and final-term workshops, learners attend classes same as that of on-campus students do. They present their assignment through PowerPoint tool and reflect on the questions raised by their fellow learners and instructor.

- The maximum time duration for completion of the coursework and research thesis for the award of degree was same for both of the programmes i.e. regular or on-campus and distance education under IDE.
- If a student was unable to complete all requirements for the award of the degree within prescribed time limit, s/he would be treated according to the IUB rules and regulations.

Programmes Offered through Distance Education

Currently, the IUB offers its programmes through distance education in Applied Psychology, Arabic, Commerce, Education, Educational Training, English, Pakistan Studies, Islamic Studies, Media Studies, Persian, Pharmacy, Physical Education and Sports Sciences, Social Work and Urdu & Iqbaliat. These programmes range from basic courses (Qura'anic Literacy) to higher education (consisting of M.Phil & PhD) level programmes including diploma, Bachelor and Masters' Level Programmes.

Objectives of the Study/Paper

It is a qualitative portrayal of experience of offering distance education programmes at a dual-mode university. The objective of this description is to portray the experience of offering academic programme at a dual mode university in Pakistan.

Significance of the Study

The study is a qualitative portrayal of an academic experience i.e. offering distance education programmes at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur that is a dual mode university in Pakistan. It disseminates useful strategic information to the academicians and administrators intending to launch distance education programmes at on-campus universities to become dual-mode universities. It is beneficial elucidation of experience for those who are already implementing or those about to embark on offering distance education programmes along with on-campus classes.

METHODOLOGY

It is a case study describing personal experience and observation of researcher in offering educational programmes through distance mode at formal university by transforming it into a dual mode university –the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. It is a narrative portrayal of personal experience and observation of researcher which disseminates useful information for academicians intending to offer distance education programmes. The impending section describes overall experience, its outcomes and challenges & issues.

Portrayal of the Experience –A Practice to Share for Common Good

Soon after its establishment, the Institute of Distance Education offered along with others, an M.Phil programme in ten disciplines through distance education mode in semester fall 2011. More than eight hundred applications were received by potential learners against 275 seats. However, after test and interview 189 students were enrolled in M.Phil programme in Applied Psychology, Arabic, Education, English, Media Studies, Islamic Studies, Pakistan Studies, History, Persian, and Urdu. In the beginning, the Institute organized an orientation workshop for learners to guide them studying in distance education system.

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Salient Features of the Experience

This case study narrates experience and observation of researcher, the findings of which are given below;

- The learners belonged to working class and they acknowledged the initiative as it provided them an opportunity of escalating their qualification and academic skills which they otherwise could not have at all. They affirmed the admission process to be competitive and merit-based following suitable criteria.
- The learners appreciated academic endeavor of institute and IUB as it provided them useful facilities and counseling services. They affirmed its environment to be gender friendly. Opportunities were open to all according to the policy of the Higher Education Commission. They used library and IT resources without any discrimination between on-campus and distance learners.

- Each of the course coordinators prepared study materials and provided to learners during orientation workshop. The course coordinators prepared material keeping in view the andragogical principles. The learners valued study materials by asserting that objectives of courses were clear and understandable. Similarly, the contents were relevant to the objectives of course(s) and the programme(s). These course contents included self-explained & self-instructional materials offered (in printed hard and soft CDs –forms) to learners for studying at their homes or work places.
- The learners cherished sequence of presentation of contents of learning materials. According to learners the contents were informative and instructive for enhancing their exposure towards new knowledge. It escalated their awareness about global perspective by enhancing their intellectual capacity. Their awareness and intellectual capacity facilitated them in cross-fertilizing information with their personal experiences generating new knowledge.
- The observation revealed that learners were feeling pleasure in using different channels of communication for enhancing interactions with their course coordinators and fellow learners. As they belonged to working class therefore, majority of them was used to in using modern technologies like mobile phones, e-mail and Skype conference and social media for synchronous and asynchronous communication and interactions. Usually, they used e-mails for submitting their assignments to their course coordinators and sharing learning experiences and problems with fellows and faculty.
- They made telephone or mobile phone calls for promoting synchronous communication & interactions with faculty and their fellow learners. It enhanced their interactions through verbal communication for mutual understanding and trust building. They could get immediate responses, feedback & comments on their work/assignments indicating the worth and quality of their work.
- The learners felt comfortable during the workshops. Their expressions indicated accepting tendency among them. They also showed their satisfaction with assessment system. However, they reported some problems like computer literacy, medium of instruction, accommodation during the workshops and reading on the screen. Similar problems were conveyed by the faculty with much emphasize on staff development, developing materials, andragogy, students' support services, infrastructure and campus environment.
- As IDE is fledgling institute, therefore, it needs properly trained manpower, appropriate infrastructure and IT equipment for its smooth functioning.
- As an academician, the researcher found extensive opportunities of flourishing dual-mode universities in Pakistan for accommodation ever increasing body of learners. There is an overwhelming acceptance of innovative programmes like distance education provided they meet the quality standards.
- However, in spite of all mentioned above, the IDE faced some challenges: maintaining global standards and meeting local demands of higher education within minimum available infrastructure and manpower.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the experience of faculty and students' aspirations it is concluded that distance education programmes offered by dual mode universities in Pakistan are useful to address the issue of lower access of people to higher education.

Such programmes provide learners opportunities of getting into higher education institutions. However, students and faculty have some problems associated with training and staff development-developing materials, providing students support services, andragogy and infrastructure.

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