

PREPARING FUTURE TEACHERS THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING: An Empirical Study on Students' Perception of Teacher Education Program Provided by AIOU Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current study was to analyse the pre service teachers training programs for the distance learners of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Islamabad, Pakistan.

This kind of training is provided to the future teachers enrolled to acquire pre service training to become a teacher in a Government educational institution in Pakistan. The data was collected by administering a 45 items agree disagree four points Likert type scale to the subjects mainly through the scheduled meetings during the workshops.

The independent sample t-test, and one way ANOVA along with mean difference was worked out for the data set. A group of 490 student teachers were randomly selected from the regions of Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar, Rahimyarkhan, Multan, and D.G.Khan Districts (Southern Punjab). The planning for training is made timely but lacking physical facilities remains dominant in trainings.

Although training plays an important role in students learning yet it is considered just a routine activity which made it a useless exercise. Similarly, findings reveal that co-curricular activities and child psychology are those aspects which ignored in the training. Future studies may be aimed at comparing the training system of teachers with teacher training through other channels of formal system of governments.

Keywords: Future teachers; pre-service training; Southern Punjab.

INTRODUCTION

Education has always been a social process by means of which a community, society, or nation has sought to transmit to the emergent generation those traditional aspects of culture which it considered fundamental and vital for its own stability and survival. The quality of education in schools depends on the competence and commitment of teachers. There is a decline in the quality of education in most developing countries as a result of inadequate teacher preparation (Bernadette, 2006).

Teacher training, education and preparation of individuals enable a person to become professional teachers. Anyone aiding another individual to learn is in a sense a teacher, special skills and abilities are necessary to succeed in the teaching profession. Chandra (2004) considers a teacher as the key in effecting change in any education system. He further challenged the competency of a teacher that an incompetent teacher cannot make much of a difference even if he is teaching in a modern classroom and is using a good textbook. Panda and Tewari (1997) explains that classroom teaching has two functions for a teacher. First, it is a place to teach students. Second, and perhaps equally important, is that it serves as place for a teacher to learn about teaching and to acquire more knowledge.

Teaching all over the world is considered as a profession and thus the teachers are provided an expert and professional status in the society. Therefore they are expected to utilize the most appropriate, effective and efficient practices and strategies to accomplish the tough demand of their occupation, which manipulate on acquaintance, information and mounting a variety of skills and thoughts in the students. Distance education differs from formal education in the sense that it takes place outside the traditional framework of the formal system. However, like formal education, non-formal education is organized and has pre-determined objectives. It also has certain sequential learning structures which are not necessarily graded (UNESCO, 1986).

The question of teacher Education is not teaching the teacher how to teach. The necessity of the teacher to perceive that the course of teacher education would help him to minimize his trouble, and to appreciate that it would save the children from much of the painful process through which he has himself passed. Teacher Education is needed for developing a purpose and for formulation of a positive attitude for the profession (Aggrawal, 1993). Govt. of Pakistan (1985) states that distance education is any deliberately organized educational activity, outside the established frame-work of normal schools and university systems. Pakistan's model of non-formal system, a distance and non-formal education model, has been successfully used by AIOU with its system of reaching the students at their homes or work places and the concept of openness. Implying life long education, the AIOU is filling the gaps left by formal system and taking education to the area and groups enable to benefit from the formal system of education. Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) was chartered in 1974 as first (world's second) Open University in Pakistan.

The university has also flourished as a very successful university. It is recognized as a leading mega university of world with its enrolment touching 5,76,000 students (Hussain, 2005). The Open University offers as many as 216 different courses through its media based and tutorially supported non-formal system. These courses have an extremely wide range, from literacy to Ph. D level (Farooq, 1996).

It is one of the distance educational system which provides pre-service teacher education programs i.e., Primary Teaching Certificate (PTC), Certificate of Teaching (CT), Oriental Teaching (OT), Arabic Teacher Training Certificate (ATTC), Bachelor of Education (B.Ed), Masters of Education (M.Ed), M.A Education, & M.A Special Education), M.Phil in Education & Special Education, and Ph.D in Education & Special Education.

Some of the above pre-service programs are basic requirement for the recruitment of teachers in Pakistan. These programs offered by AIOU through postal service/correspondence not only in all over the Pakistan but also at international level. The curriculum contents are provided in the shape of lectures to the students through various programs on televisions, radio, tutorial meetings with concerned tutors, workshops and DVDs. The main components are correspondence material, Radio, Television, Study Centres, Audio Visual Aids and Distance Tutor (Rashid, 1992). Rashid (1992) further explained that pre-produced courses are the basis of distance study which is usually in a printed form but may also be supplemented by other media as television, radio programs, experimental kits or audio or video tapes. Students are directed to attend workshops and writing of two-four assignments for fixed credit hours are mandatory. The research in hand aims to examine the pre-service teacher education Programs provided through distance education system by AIOU Pakistan and inspect the training needs of the student teachers.

THE CURRENT STUDY

The demand for education in the developing world, through the formal system, has consistently overrun its resources in Pakistan, such an alternative system commonly known distance learning model is successfully being used by Allama Iqbal Open University, a multi-media, multilevel, multi-method teaching institution (Khan,1986).

Siddiqui (1984) further argued that the other important national agencies engaged in non-formal system are the Family Planning Associate, National Faun Guide Council of Pakistan, EPPIERD project of the Ministry of Education, Integrated Functional Education Project of AIOU and the Adult Education Project of the National Integrated Rural Development Project. However, the role of AIOU Pakistan is vital in providing education from matriculation level to doctorate level.

The role of AIOU is dominant in providing teacher education to the students in learning while earning in Pakistan. It has a largest amount of students as compare to other universities of the country in pre-service teacher education programs. AIOU is playing a very effective role in development of distance teacher education programs (Awan, Jabeen & Bibi, 2011). Grooming of a teacher to perform an effective role in the society depends on his grooming of pre-service training while entering in the profession as a teacher. Therefore, the role of training for perspective teacher is vital. A study of AIOU's teacher training program can improve the process for a better grooming of future teachers as well as the next generation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To extract the findings, following research questions were formulated.

- How AIOU students deal with their training sessions in their study programs?

- To analyze existing training contents and training procedure?
- To identify training needs of student teachers to meet the quality standards?
- To extract students' perception regarding their teacher training programs?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Keeping in view the nature of the study, a survey method was considered suitable to collect the requisite information (Best & Khan, 2008; Johnson & Christenson, 2012). The AIOU offers various teacher education programs to enable future teachers for educating students from primary level to university level.

There are various prescribed criteria for the students to get admission in different teacher education programs for being a teacher at various levels. However, graduates of postgraduate courses i.e., Master of Education (M.Ed) and Master of Arts in Education (M.A. Education) are eligible to teach from primary to university level.

The present study choose to focus on the AIOU postgraduate courses of pre-service teacher training keeping in view the vitalization of these programs in Pakistani educational system.

Multistage sampling was adopted to select the sample. Researchers selected five out of 36 AIOU regional centers as a convenience sample situated at districts Bahawalpur, Bahwalnagar, Rahim Yar Khan, Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan (Southern Punjab). Equally, 100 student teachers were randomly selected selected ($n = 5 \times 100 = 500$).

These students were enrolled in thier continuous semester i.e., Autumn, 2012. The return rate of the return of tool was hundred percent however 478 questionnaire of stuent teachers were considered appropriate to record the data. The mean score of the ages of 450 respondents was 30.03 years;wheras rest of the students did not show their ages. Age of the respondents ranged from 23 to 45 years. The ratio of female student teachers was 59%.

The study was delimited in respect of generalization of its findings. Baccuse the participants of the study were selected from five regional centers of AIOU, hence the extracted results of the current study were applicable to the student of these areas.

The

Development of a valid and reliable research instrument was an important stage of the current research. For this purpose, after review of literature, a four point likert scale of 24 items was developed from agree to disagree to meet the research objectives of current study.

A brief introductory paragraph stating research objectives of the study, scale, including the four levels of agreement and disagreement was conveyed to the students before administering the tool.

Content-related evidence of the validity was attained through a panel of field experts involving five members. Some of the items were modified according to expert opinion wheras four items were deleted. The items which reveals 0.7 or above Cronbach's Alpha were accepted in the scale.

FINDINGS

Table: 1 reveals that all the activities of the training are planned well in time according to 75% student teachers however 70% of the respondents consider current planning for the training inadequate.

Table: 1
Planning of Training

Item No.	Items	Agree <i>f</i>	%	Disagree <i>f</i>	%
01	There is no adequate planning for the training.	335	70	143	30
02	Improvement of teachers' communication skills is the major objective of the training.	406	85	72	15
03	All the activities of the training are planned well in time.	358	75	120	25
04	An ample amount is spent for training of the teachers.	344	72	134	28
05	The laboratories of the training centers are not fully equipped.	358	75	120	25
06	Teachers are happy with the present system of training.	253	53	125	47
07	Training halls are not well furnished.	329	69	149	31
08	Training venue is inconvenient for most of the participants	377	79	101	21
Paired Sample "t" Test	Agree Mean 3.00 Agree S.D 108.66 t 7.529 Disagree S.D 52.84 df 9 Sig 0.000				

The major objective of the training is to improve the communication skill of the participants satisfy 85% respondents.

To more than 69% teachers the laboratories and training halls are not fully furnished. However, the training venue is inconvenient for most of the participants as perceived by 79% teachers.

There is a significant difference between agree and disagree sets of responses in favour of agree side.

Although more than 71% respondents considered the training as a beneficial yet they take it as a routine activity. 78% teachers revealed that training plays a vital role in improving the students' learning (Table 2). Between agree and disagree responses the significant difference exists in acceptance of significance of the training by the respondents.

Table: 2
Significance of Training

Item No.	Items	Agree <i>f</i>	%	Disagree <i>f</i>	%
01	Teachers' training is beneficial for most of the student teachers.	339	71	139	29
02	Teachers training play a vital role in improving the students' learning.	374	78	104	22
03	The teachers training workshop is just a routine activity.	358	75	120	25
Paired Sample "t" Test	Agree Mean 3.25 Disagree S.D 28.46	Agree S.D 40.47 df 3	t 12.76 Sig .001		

Table: 3 shows that more than 72% teachers are trained to use A.V.Aids, latest educational technology in the class rooms with techniques to evaluate students' performance.

Table 3
Contents of training

Item No.	Items	Agree <i>f</i>	%	Disagree <i>f</i>	%
01	Teachers are trained to use A.V.Aids in class rooms.	374	78	104	22
02	In teachers training, the teachers learned how to use the latest educational technology in class rooms.	344	72	134	28
03	Co curricular activities are totally ignored in the training.	377	79	101	21
04	In teachers training, the teachers are learned how to evaluate the students' performance.	344	72	134	28
05	The training does not focus child psychology.	301	63	177	37
06	During training you are given sufficient material on various aspects of teaching.	342	71	136	29
07	The contents of training do not fulfill the needs of trainees.	380	80	98	20
Paired Sample "t" Test	Agree Mean 3.42 Disagree S.D 43.86	Agree S.D 74.34 df 6	t 9.34 Sig .000		

Seventy nine percent teachers expressed their dissatisfaction that co-curricular activities are totally ignored in the training. There is no focus on child psychology in the training as recorded by 63% teachers.

Seventy one percent teachers during training were given sufficient material on various aspects of teaching but 80% trainees expressed that the contents of training do not fulfill their needs. The items regarding contents of the training are significant at the level of 0.000.

Table: 4 shows the views of more than 75% teachers that majority of the trainers are senior administrators having vast training experience but they do not have clear concept of training according to 60% trainees.

Therefore, competent university teachers are invited to deliver lectures to the trainees as viewed by 84% trainee teachers. More than 76% teachers pointed out the shortage of the teacher's at training centers.

Table: 4
Quality of Teacher's Trainers

Item No.	Items	Agree <i>f</i>	%	Disagree <i>f</i>	%
01	Majority of the trainers are senior administrators of the government schools.	358	75	120	25
02	Most of the trainers have vast experience of the training.	368	77	110	23
03	There is shortage of competent teachers.	372	78	106	22
04	There is a shortage of the competent persons at the training centers.	363	76	115	24
05	The competent university teachers are invited to deliver lectures to the trainees.	401	84	77	16
06	The authorities who conduct training did not have clear concept of training.	286	60	192	40
Paired Sample "t" Test	Agree Mean 3.17	Agree S.D 98.96		<i>t</i> 6.724	
	Disagree S.D 51.54	df 5	Sig .001		

According to Table: 5, there is no effect of gender on the planning for teacher training. Between the perception of male and female teachers on designing the training schedule is significantly different.

Male and female teachers hold similar views on the improvement of teachers' communication skills as an objective of training. The perceptions of male and female teachers are significantly different on the conduct of training programmes.

In case of female teachers the training sessions are more frequent as compared to males. Both the genders are consistent on the contents and time duration of training. More or less equally equipped laboratories and halls are available for the training of both the genders. The females are more contented with the present system of training. The training venue equally suited to both the groups.

Table: 5
Trainees' Gender Effects on Planning of Training

Item No.	Items	Male Mean	Female Mean	df	t	Sig
01	There is no adequate planning for the training.	2.46	2.32	298	1.398	.163
02	Improvement of teachers' communication skills is the major objective of the training.	1.98	2.00	298	-.227	.820
03	All the activities of the training are planned well in time.	2.12	2.31	298	-1.909	.057
04	An ample amount is spent for training the teachers.	2.30	2.40	298	-.908	.365
05	The laboratories of the training centers are not fully equipped.	2.42	2.22	298	1.748	.081
06	Teachers are happy with the present system of training.	2.50	2.91	298	-3.842	.000
07	Training halls are not well furnished.	2.44	2.23	298	2.163	.031
08	. Training venue is inconvenient for most of the participants	2.16	2.21	298	-.503	.616

Table: 6 depicts the significant difference of gender effect between the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding usage of training. In case of male teachers they considered it as a useless exercise as compared to females. The perceptions of male and females on the vital role of teachers in improving student's performance are significantly different. The group of female teachers is more frequently able to improve the students learning than males. The effect of gender between male and female perceptions existed as a significant difference in favour of female side regarding participation in training which reveals that they have to participate in the training courses once in a year as compared with males. Teachers' training is considered as a routine activity for both of the gender.

Table: 6
Trainees' Gender Effects on Significance of Training

Item No.	Items	Male Mean	Female Mean	df	t	Sig
01	Teachers' training is useless exercise for most of the teacher.	2.56	2.20	298	3.280	.001
02	Teachers training play a vital role in improving the students' learning.	2.02	2.43	298	-3.538	.000
03	The teachers training workshop is just a routine activity.	2.26	2.11	298	1.394	.178

Table: 7 shows the gender effects between the perception of male and female teachers in favour of female side regarding providence of training material.

This group reveals that during training, they were given sufficient material on various aspects of teaching as compared to males. Between the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding needs of trainees was significantly different. The male teachers stated that the contents of training do not fulfill their needs as compared to females. As regard the use of A.V. Aids and latest educational technology in class rooms both the gender has similar views. They also stated that co-curricular activities and child psychology are totally ignored in the training.

Table 7
Trainees' Gender Effects on Contents of Training

Item No.	Items	Male Mean	Female Mean	df	t	Sig
01	Teachers are trained to use A.V.Aids in class rooms.	2.08	2.27	298	-1.743	.082
02	In teachers training, the teachers learned how to use the latest educational technology in class rooms.	2.41	2.51	298	-.938	.349
03	Co-curricular activities are totally ignored in the training.	2.24	2.13	298	1.063	.289
04	In teachers training, the teachers are learned how to evaluate the students' performance.	2.32	2.47	298	-1.574	.117
05	The training does not focus child psychology.	2.46	2.36	298	.970	.333
06	During training you are given sufficient material on various aspects of teaching.	2.41	2.81	298	-3.431	.001
07	The contents of training do not fulfill the needs of trainees.	2.32	1.96	298	4.115	.000

Table: 8 defines that both male and female revealed that majority of trainers are senior administrators of the school who have vast experience of training. Significant difference existed between the perceptions of male and female in favour of female side regarding shortage of teachers.

Table 8
Trainees' Gender Effects on Quality of Teacher's Trainers

Item No.	Items	Male Mean	Female Mean	df	t	Sig
01	Majority of the trainers are senior administrators of the government schools.	2.15	2.35	298	-1.837	.067
02	Most of the trainers have vast experience of the training.	2.29	2.19	298	.843	.400
03	There is shortage of teachers trainers in F.G Schools.	2.23	2.49	298	-2.460	.014
04	There is a shortage of the competent persons at the training centers.	2.22	2.32	298	-.963	.337
05	The competent university teachers are invited to deliver lectures to the trainees.	2.17	2.01	298	1.376	.170
06	The authorities who conduct training did not have clear concept of training.	2.57	2.59	298	-.141	.888

This group frequently expressed the shortage of teachers' trainers in their schools as compared to males. In rest of the cases there is no effect of trainees' gender on the quality of teachers' trainers.

DISCUSSION

Main focus of the research tool was to highlight different aspects of the training and needs of teachers during the training which was not focused in earlier researches (i.e., (Awan, et al., 2011; Bakhsh, 2010). Main focus of Awan et al., and Bakhsh (2010) was given to the process of admission and about the quality of learning material however they also reveal their findings regarding training sessions. Bakhsh (2010) concluded that contents of AIOU teacher education programs are easy and comprehensive.

However, this study presents that the students were not satisfied from the contents of training material. Students show their inverse ideas in this regard.

According to majority of the students, in training contents, children's psychology and co-curricular activities are totally ignored in lecture sessions. Students also express that they are provided insufficient material during the training.

Findings also reveal that the schedule of the trainings is planned and provided well in time but they considered it inadequate. Students criticized the unsuitable venue as well as insufficient arrangements of equipped labs. On the other hand, Awan et al., (2011) concluded that sufficient material is provided to the students of AIOU but their study remained silent regarding the material of training contents of AIOU. This study filled this gap which was ignored in previous researches related to the various aspects of training sessions.

Awan et al., (2011) further found that workshop of a course through AIOU covered all the content of the course, which are rejected by the current study through which students were found complaining in this perspective. Although the conclusions made by Bakhsh (2010) majority of the respondents were satisfied with environment, resource persons, effective lectures, facilities, professional knowledge and skill of the resource persons and venue of the workshop yet the findings of the current research rejected these notions.

The current study also reveal that students as well as the teachers take the training program as just a routine activity however they accepted its benefits as well as the grooming of participants in the training which verifies the study results of Jumani (2011) through his case study of teachers training through distance mode in Allama Iqbal open university (Aiou) Pakistan which revealed that AIOU train its teachers by providing blended approaches through Tutorial and workshops.

The current study found that AIOU in these regions where the study was conducted did not have their own competent trainers in the regions of Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan Multan and D.G. Khan. This is because of the main campus of the university is located in Islamabad and all the faculty staff did their jobs in main campus.

Therefore, to fulfill this gap, teachers of the other universities situated in the concerned regions are invited as trainers to train the perspective teachers. Data further express male and female teachers' perception that held similar views on the improvement of teachers' communication skills as an objective of training.

In addition, perceptions of male and females on the vital role of teachers in improving student's performance was significantly different. Statistical data further indicates that overall opinion of the segment depicts the role of AIOU in preparing future teachers for the country is vital and the university is performing its excellent role in this regard.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study was designed to examine the perception of students regarding teacher education program as well as assess the training needs of AIOU teacher education students and the role of their courses in their grooming.

It is concluded that the AIOU teacher education syllabi fulfill the theoretical needs of the students which verifies the earlier research of Awan (2011) and Bakhsh (2010) but presents the inverse results regarding the practical aspects of student teachers training. It was revealed through data analysis that the training received by the teachers had not significantly affected their performance in their practical work. Concerned authorities were found deficient in some skills of management.

It leads to the conclusion that they maintained the discipline during training but did not have clear concepts of training as selection and arrangement of contents and trainers. Lack of facilities at training venue, laboratories and halls was found another weak point of concerned administrators which could be attributed to lack of training facilities in these institutions. The trainee teachers found complaining about the training as a routine activity and a useless exercise which show the ignorance and non-serious attitude of concerned officials towards training.

Teachers were complaining about the contents selection that although they were trained to use a.v.aids, modern education technology, evaluation techniques, and etc yet these contents did not fulfill their needs and co-curricular activities are totally ignored in training.

The current study concluded, although the competent trainers were invited from the universities to deliver the lectures yet they hesitated to visit these centers. Majority of the senior administrators had vast experience of training but they were unable to select the content of training according to the needs of teachers.

After examining the AIOU teacher education programs, its role in grooming and preparing the future teachers for country is vital among students from difference universities, strengthens the programs' value and effectiveness. An important contribution of the existing study is its evidence-based confirmation that distance learning programs can prepare future teachers in an effective way.

The study also presents the possible ways for the improvements in these programs. The deficiency may be overcome while removing the drawbacks of practical aspect of teacher programs highlighted in current research along with fulfilling the desired needs of the students mentioned in current research. Since the scope of this research was limited to the study of some major components of teacher training. In addition to replication studies, investigation may be conducted by taking other components of other teacher training programmes. Studies should be carried out to identify training needs of teachers of other areas, to identify where they need further orientation to strengthen weak areas.

Future studies may be aimed at comparing the training system of teachers with teacher training through other channels of formal system of governments.

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