

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES OF AIOU AND UKOU

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to compare the availability, quality, similarities and differences of student support services in Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) and United Kingdom Open University (UKOU) and also to identify and enlist the deficiencies that AIOU students are facing in the student support services. The study found out that student support services of AIOU are quantitatively developing rapidly on the lines of UKOU. Though the regional campuses of both the institutions have almost the same status in the provision of student support service yet the UKOU students have better services in the guidance and counseling, modern communication facilities and career guidance. Moreover, there also exists Open University student association in UKOU. The conclusions led to the recommendation that AIOU regional campuses may be made independent like UKOU, counseling and guidance cell might be established at every regional campus, modern communication facilities like toll free, auto answer may be provided at AIOU regional campuses.

Keywords: Student support services, General services, Tutorial services, Media support services, Counseling services, Library services.

INTRODUCTION

The success of distance education system largely depends on the effectiveness of its student support services. So it is necessary to explain the term student support services. Rashid (1998) described the term student support services as the way and means that provide additional help to distance learner.

It refers to the help, which a distance learner receives along with the learning materials. It has many forms i.e. face-to-face teaching, computer mediated communication, counseling, workshop, telephone tutorial, tutorship supports etc.

Students support services comprise of a cluster of facilities and activities that are intended to make the learning process easier and more interesting for the learner.

Student support services in distance education serve as the crossing point between the institution and the learner. The organization and functioning of student support services is related to the activities/products of different sub-systems of distance education and focusing learning process towards curricula development, course materials preparation and delivery mechanism. In this regard Sewart (1993) points out that the structure and activities of student support services are dependent upon:

- **The infinite needs of the clients.**
- **The educational ethos of the region and of the institution.**
- **Dispersal of the student, body, availability of resources, curriculum and product of the course—production, sub-system.**
- **Generic differences (extent of heterogeneity) of the target group.**

Student support services at each level therefore, have their own specific duties and functions to facilitate a networking, which helps and strengthens the delivery system of distance education courses at different level.

The student support services eventually aim at compensating for the absence of live support from teacher for the benefit of the isolated individual learners and making the necessary basic facilities, available to them directly or indirectly. These services play the role of relay station (Sharma, 1998).

The support services refer to any service other than the actual course material, which an institution provides to its learners to realize the instructional objective of the course (Gupta and Gupta, 1999). Apart from helping the students in learning and comprehending the course material supplied to them, the queries also should be answered as and when required and information needed by the students should be supplied to them (Aggarwal, 1991). However the student support services sub-system is probably the most difficult sub-system to manage (Power et al, 2000).

The salient objectives of the student support services in a distance education can be summarized as under:

- **To help learners fruitfully utilize the learning package by augmenting it with academic support services;**
- **To help them make their choice and decisions by providing administrative and information support;**
- **To reduce their sense of isolation caused by distance and consequent lack of regular personal contact;**
- **To provide learners with access to resources and opportunities for personalized interaction whether mediated or free to face (Moaler, 1996).**

The student support services, thus, tend to have a low status on the whole (Gupta and Gupta, 1999). The quality of correspondence education has been low in terms of course sessions, student support and student learning (Power, et al. 2000).

Sharma (1998) found that the main drawback of the system is weak student support services. As a result, the distance learners, are dissatisfied, frustrated, confused and they are dropping out from the system.

So, students support services is the provision of assistance to meet student's needs. It provides advice on study skills, career choice, accommodation, part time employment, personal and inter personal development, medical matters, scholarship, financial difficulties among other things. The services exist to address needs or problems which students may have in order to allow them to concentrate more on their studies.

Different authors have presented different models of students support services. Two of these are basic ones. Chicano-Duce (1985) describes these basic models as:

The first model depends entirely or primarily on non-contiguous communication. The two-way communication between planner and institution is conducted through a variety of media such as written audio or video recorded or telephones communication. The second model incorporates face-to-face contact into support relationships. The non-contiguous mode is least costly to administer and is as effective in facilitating student's success as the face-to-face model.

Tallman (1993) states: "the student support services of the distance education often include an orientation component in which students' dialogue with a representative of the distance education faculty or staff regarding the suitability of the programme and its reference to the needs and context of the student". Department of Distance and Non-Formal Education conducts orientation workshops. For example, orientation workshop of M.Phil students in first semester orientation and tips for studying and solving the assignments. Department of Distance and Non-formal Education also conducts workshop and programme in every course before the final examination.

However, the student support services means providing help or assistance to distance learner. Open universities provide student support services through regional networks. These provide pre-admission guidance and counseling to the students, provide information about admission procedure, post choice, financial difficulties, accommodations and some personal problems, which affect the student's studies. The regional campus provides student support services like tutorial services and other communication services. The main purpose of the student support services is that, the students concentrate fully on their studies.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

The study centre as a support system in distance education has been used in other parts of the world, including Europe, Asia and the Southern hemisphere in most cases the British Open University model has been used, either directly or indirectly in an adapted form. The Fern University in Hagan set up a system. Similar to that of the British model, with some fifteen-study centers, no evaluative reports have been published on their relative success as a student support system.

The Fern University also has Mentors, but they do not have special responsibilities for specific students, as do tutor-counselors in the Open University. Rashid (1998) describes the Allama Iqbal Open University of Pakistan has thirty-two regional study centers controlling a network of smaller local centers. This university also has a tutor counseling system based on the British model.

Both Australia and New Zealand use the study centre as a support system in distance education. In Australia, Deakin University, the University of Queen land, and other tertiary institutions use different types of study centre systems to suit the particular

needs of each individual system. Whilst they may have some similarity to the study centre system of the Open University, they have developed independently and owe little to the British system.

Rashid (1998) comments that Open University of Great Britain has provided greater impetus toward developing options for higher learning than any other educational movement in the last one hundred years.

West Germany, Japan and South Africa have been influenced by the British model. However, Fletcher states that the impact of the Open University has been felt most fully in the United States of America.

The major learning centers are in Albany, New York city, Long Island, Rochester, Suffern and Buffalo, each has a dean, administrative support staff, and a faculty of thirteen to fifteen full time 'mentors' who assist up to five hundred students in developing individualized programmes of study. A mentor usually supervises about twenty-five to thirty students, meeting each one twice a month and sometimes once a week.

Pscharopoulos (1973) describes the future plans of empire state to establish satellite centers that would provide learning centers within commuting distance for most citizens of New York each would be administered by the dean of the regional centre.

An example of one such satellite centre, established in Manhattan, S Regional Learning Centre, is called the centre of labour studies. The regional learning centre would have a small core faculty of mentors and a supply of teaching and study materials. Each satellite would be staffed by as few as one full time mentor or counselor, and a complement of part time faculty and tutors, enough to serve the specialized needs of the local students.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN PAKISTAN

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/ Centres 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 upto 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 centres.

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:

1. Establishing of sub-regional coordinating offices in remote areas.
2. Training of newly recruited offices.
3. Establishment of libraries in regional offices.
4. Appointment of senior tutors with particular reference to monitoring of tutors performance.
5. Improvements in model study centres.

6. Consolidation of physical facilities in regional and construction of regional campuses.
7. Strengthening of regional centres to provide better services.
8. To computerized the regional centres for better record keeping and solving student problems at local levels.
9. 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 expert's 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 centres. 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 centres 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 non-established over 780 study centres where tutorials are held as per study schedule. 70 of these study centres 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 centres and study centres. Study centres are generally carry out one or more of there functions, academic, advisor and administrative.

UNITED KINGDOM OPEN UNIVERSITY (UKOU)

The UKOU started functioning in 1971. In a country of 55 million people there were 67000 part-time undergraduate learners studying in six faculty areas in 1985.

United Kingdom Open University is the first Distance Education University in the world. Britain took the first step to formalize the loose systems and shaped the first distance educational institution. The university is committed to equal opportunities for all. It is open to every section of the community regardless of the background or circumstance and it is committed to creating conditions whereby all students can participate equally in the university activities.

For nearly 30 years the United Kingdom University has been acknowledged as the leader in part time education and training through the method it successfully pioneered and developed. United Kingdom Open University supported open learning.

The flexibility and quality of the Open University approach to teaching has led more than two million people to study with it more than 30,000 employers to sponsor their staff on course.

The U.K. Open University has helped more than two million students of all ages and backgrounds to achieve their aspirations and goals. Since its foundation in 1969 the U.K. Open University has become one of the greatest success stories of O.K. higher education.

More than two million people have studied successfully with university and university has earned a worldwide reputation for the quality of the courses and the effectiveness of the supported open learning method, it pioneered.

Mackenzie et. al. (1975, p.16) viewed the idea of late Lord Crowther, the first Chancellor of the Open University as:

The Open University would be open not only as to entry, but as to place (no campus) as to method (the use of any communication medium that promoted its educational purposes) and as to ideas (in that it would be conceived not only with necessary skills experience, but with all that human understanding can encompass).

In 1975, the report of National Association of Education Broadcasts identified the essential characteristics of open learning system.

Mackenzie (1975, p.116) summarized these as:

- The system must guide a student by eliciting interpreting and analyzing goals at the beginning point and throughout the student's contact with the programme of the instruction.
- The system must formulate learning objectives in such a way that they serve as the basis for making decisions in instructional design including evaluation and in such a way that they will be fully known to accepted by or modification by students.
- The system must facilitate the participation of learners without imposing traditional academic entry requirements without the pursuit of an academic degree or other certification as the exclusive award.
- To provide the flexibility required to satisfy a variety of individual needs the system should make it operationally possible to employ sound television, film and print media as option for mediating learning experiences.
- The system should use testing and evaluation principally to diagnose and analyze the extent to which specified learning objectives have been accomplished. In other world, the system should be competence based.
- The system must also accommodate distance between the instructional staff resources and the learner, employing the distance as a positive element in the developing of independence in learning.

The Open University makes every effort to create the conditions whereby students and staff are treated solely on the basis of merit, abilities and potentials, regardless of gender, colour, ethnic or natural origin, age, socio-economic background, disability, religious political beliefs, family circumstances or other relevant distinctions.

REGIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES (UKOU)

Tutorial/Day School

Tutorials are the most important segment of distance education system. Many students find them very helpful whereas some students have found them invaluable in supporting their studies. Tutorials provide excellent opportunities for students to

enhance their understanding of course material and to address any area of difficulty which may have been encountered, to participate in group activities and discussions which help and give a wider dimension to their studies, to meet their tutor in person, to establish valuable links with other students taking the same course.

According to the report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and the Government's plan for funding and student's support (1997):

The Open University attaches great importance to the local and personal support that it provides tutor students. It has developed a national system of tutorial support, assessment and counseling that allows for interaction between students and tutors in a variety of ways. Tutor (now called Associate Lecturers) mark the assignments submitted by students and provide detailed written feedback on each essay. They meet students in tutorials and they keep in contact through telephone or computer network, either individually or collective through audio/computer conferencing.

Guidelines for the students on the formation of self help ground are available from the regional student services. If student group wish to meet at a local Open University centre student can book a room through tutor services at the regional centres. If any student unable to attend the scheduled tutorials tutor maybe able to assist student over the telephone, or offer on occasional individual face to face session with the students.

Regional Network (UKOU)

Students of distance education have to experience a variety of problems at different stages from pre-entry stage to passing out. In order to reduce and eliminate such problems, open universities have established a network of regional centres/ offices to arrange support services. According to the student services communication team of the open universities (2000): "The University's central headquarters is at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes and there are thirteen regional centres and over 290 study centres in the United Kingdom and other countries (Ten regional centres in Scotland, Wales and Ireland). The regional director heads each region".

Regional centre provides guidance and information about local tuition; examination and residential school arrangements as well as more general help with study problems or difficulties that one may encounter. The university has local representatives in most European countries where it registers students. Their main duties are to offer information and advice to enquirer's and to coordinate study centres and examination arrangements.

According to Booklet "U.K. Open University Regional Structure in the South (2000) based a the South Regional Centre at Boars Hill in Oxford are teams of academic, administrative, advisory and clerical and secretarial staff, handed by the regional director.

They publicize the university's courses, collect fees, maintain student data, planning for students and assist them in solving study problems, monitoring student progress, provide learning skill support and educational guidance, appoint and supervise the part-time staff, arrange summer schools and weekend schools, organize examinations and award ceremony.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was based on the following objectives:

- To describe the student support services in distance education.
- To compare the student support services OF AIOU and UKOU.
- To identify the problems in student support services of AIOU and UKOU.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population and Sampling

The population of the study consisted of the 2170 students of B.Ed level (UKOU 520 and AIOU 1650).The 200 students each from both the universities were considered as sample of the study.

Research Tool Development and Data Collection

Since the study was descriptive in nature, therefore, survey approach was considered appropriate to collect the data. For the purpose, questionnaire on five-point (Likert) scale was developed with one open ended question at the end of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was validated through pilot testing on 50 students.

Administration of Research Tool

The finalized questionnaire was administered on students personally as well as by mail. All the students responded.

Data Analysis

The data collected through questionnaire were coded and analyzed through Ms- Excel in terms of percentage and mean scores. Scale values assigned to each of the five responses was as

Level of Agreement	Scale Value
SA	5
A	4
UNC	3
DA	2
SDA	1

To calculate the mean score, following formula was used.

$$\text{Mean Score} = \frac{(\text{FSA} \times 5 + \text{FA} \times 4 + \text{FUNC} \times 3 + \text{FDA} \times 2 + \text{FSDA} \times 1)}{N}$$

Where

FSA = Frequency of Strongly Agreed responses.

FA = Frequency of Agreed responses.

FUNC = Frequency of Uncertain responses.

FDA = Frequency of Disagreed responses.

FSDA = Frequency of Strongly Disagreed responses.

FINDINGS

Data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed in terms of percentage and mean score. The findings drawn out from the data analysis are given below.

Table: 1
Opinion of students about general services of student support services

S.No	Statements	Country	SA	A	UN C	DA	SD A	Mean Score
1	The study material was timely received.	UK	117	61	7	11	4	4.38
		Pakistan	92	56	23	9	20	3.96
2	The study material was self-explanatory and involved the students into studies.	UK	71	104	10	7	8	4.12
		Pakistan	82	57	19	27	15	3.82
3	Admission forms and related information were easily available to the students.	UK	52	91	13	15	29	3.61
		Pakistan	61	76	22	15	26	3.66
4	The system of assessment and evaluation was satisfactory.	UK	102	71	11	13	3	4.28
		Pakistan	30	22	2	81	65	2.36
5	The planning, execution and monitoring of support services were satisfactory	UK	108	51	9	20	12	4.12
		Pakistan	18	27	12	109	34	2.43
6	Educational programmes of open university broadcast were valuable.	UK	131	39	5	12	13	4.32
		Pakistan	51	83	12	31	23	3.54
7	Information about telecast/ teleconferencing was timely provided.	UK	91	44	21	18	76	4.03
		Pakistan	31	55	19	71	24	2.99
8	Workshops were arranged at convenient places.	UK	71	58	16	30	25	3.60
		Pakistan	41	73	37	29	19	3.43
9	The number of tutorial meetings was adequate.	UK	66	78	19	21	16	3.79
		Pakistan	53	80	21	34	12	3.64

10	Students who submit their assignments in time get special advantages.	UK	119	65	2	9	5	4.42
		Pakistan	93	55	20	12	20	3.95
11	Tutors accustomed to give guidance and encouraged comments on assignments.	UK	61	72	25	27	15	3.69
		Pakistan	11	49	21	58	61	2.46
12	Assignments returned well in time to the students with detailed instructions.	UK	81	75	11	22	11	3.97
		Pakistan	30	61	35	70	14	3.27

It is evident from Table: 1 that twelve items were taken for general services of student support services and on all the twelve items mean score of students from United Kingdom Open University is comparatively better in comparison to the mean score of students of Allama Iqbal Open University.

The mean score of Students of AIOU is less than 3.00 on the three statements which does not support the statement no. 4, 5, 7 and 11 on the system of assessment and evaluation was satisfactory, the planning, execution and monitoring of support services were satisfactory, Information about telecast/teleconferencing was timely provided, tutors accustomed to give guidance and encouraged comments on assignments.

Table: 2

Showing the significant difference on general services of A I O U and UK O U

Name of Universities	Number of Items	Mean	S.D	df	Value of t	p- value
UK O U	12	4.0275	.29778			
A I O U	12	3.2925	.59472	22	3.828	0.001

It is evident from Table: 2 that there is a significant difference between the mean score of UKOU and AOIU on general services provided to the students of distance education. It is concluded from above table that UKOU provides better general services to the students.

It is evident from Table: 3 that eight items were taken for regional office services of student support services and on all the eight items mean score of students from United Kingdom Open University is comparatively better in comparison with the mean score of students of Allama Iqbal Open University.

The mean score of Students of AIOU is less than 3.00 on the five statements which does not support the statement no. 2 , 3 , 4 ,7 and 8 by students of AIOU on regional office fully cooperated to meet students' needs, counseling process was helpful to the students in solving their study problems, appropriate mass media (radio, TV and newspaper) was used to provide relevant information by the regional campus, Supplementary/additional books and material were available in the regional office and Group discussions were held to solve students' problem in the study centre.

While the mean score on all the items of UKOU on regional office services is 3.57 to 3.98, this shows that regional office services offered by UKOU are better than AIOU.

Table: 3
Opinion of students about Regional Office Services of student support services

S.No	Statements	Country	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	Mean Score
1	Admission forms and information were easily available well in time at regional office.	UK	86	69	8	23	14	3.95
		Pakistan	51	47	25	40	37	3.18
2	Regional office fully cooperated to meet students' needs.	UK	78	71	23	15	13	3.93
		Pakistan	21	45	31	66	37	2.74
3	Counseling process was helpful to the students in solving their study problems.	UK	71	69	11	25	24	3.69
		Pakistan	20	37	13	51	79	2.34
4	Appropriate mass media (radio, TV and newspaper) was used to provide relevant information by the regional campus.	UK	77	83	12	15	13	3.98
		Pakistan	40	39	22	61	38	2.91
5	Regional office gives instant response to students' queries.	UK	59	81	10	39	11	3.69
		Pakistan	36	71	22	51	20	3.26
6	Regional office helps students in difficulties concerning examinations.	UK	71	53	11	49	16	3.57
		Pakistan	45	73	22	38	22	3.41
7	Supplementary/ additional books and material were available in the regional office.	UK	71	63	25	36	5	3.80
		Pakistan	13	44	21	53	69	2.40
8	Group discussions were held to solve students' problem in the study centre.	UK	67	69	12	31	21	3.65
		Pakistan	19	35	31	74	41	2.59

It is evident from Table: 3 that eight items were taken for regional office services of student support services and on all the eight items mean score of students from United Kingdom Open University is comparatively better in comparison with the mean score of students of Allama Iqbal Open University. The mean score of Students of AIOU is less than 3.00 on the five statements which does not support the statement no. 2 , 3 , 4 ,7 and 8 by students of AIOU on Regional office fully cooperated to meet students' needs, Counseling process was helpful to the students in solving their study problems, Appropriate mass media (radio, TV and newspaper) was used to provide relevant information by the regional campus, Supplementary/ additional books and material were available in the regional office and Group discussions were held to solve students' problem in the study centre. While the mean score on all the items of UKOU on regional office services is 3.57 to 3.98, this shows that regional office services offered by UKOU are better than AIOU.

Table: 4
Showing the significant difference on regional office services of A I O U and UK O U

Name of Universities	Number of Items	Mean	S.D	df	Value of t	p- value
UK O U	8	3.7825	.15536			
A I O U	8	2.8537	.40292	14	6.083	0.000

It is evident from Table: 4 that there is a significant difference between the mean score of UKOU and AOIU on regional office services provided to the students of distance education.

Table: 5
Opinion of students about Tutorial Services of student support services

S.No	Statements	Country	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	Mean Score
1	Study centers had an easy access to the students.	UK	86	64	11	21	18	3.90
		Pakistan	45	87	11	32	25	3.48
2	Competent persons were appointed as tutors in the related subject.	UK	45	87	12	32	24	3.49
		Pakistan	59	38	29	51	23	3.30
3	Tutorial sessions were helpful to solve the study problems of students.	UK	82	43	14	47	14	3.66
		Pakistan	42	63	33	40	22	3.32
4	Tutors were punctual in the tutorial meetings.	UK	66	75	13	24	22	3.70
		Pakistan	42	67	25	49	17	3.34
5	Tutors give comments on student assignments.	UK	61	83	11	33	12	3.74
		Pakistan	35	67	31	44	23	3.24
6	Tutors return the marked assignments well in time with instructions and further guidance	UK	53	87	12	35	13	3.66
		Pakistan	51	69	25	31	24	3.46
7	Sufficient A.V aids were available at the study centers to meet the student needs	UK	69	71	15	33	12	3.76
		Pakistan	15	38	17	88	42	2.48
8	Tutorial meetings provided the students to identify their deficiencies and difficulties in their studies.	UK	42	75	13	46	24	3.33
		Pakistan	53	47	24	52	24	3.27

It is concluded from the above table that UKOU provides better regional office services to the students.

It is evident from Table: 5 that eight items were taken for tutorial services of student support services and on all the eight items mean score of students from United Kingdom Open University is comparatively better in comparison with the mean score of students of Allama Iqbal Open University. The mean score of Students of AIOU is less than 3.00 on the one statement which does not support the statement no. 7 on Sufficient A.V aids were available at the study centers to meet the student needs. While the mean score on all the items of UKOU on regional office services is 3.33 to 3.90, this shows that regional office services offered by UKOU are better than AIOU.

Table: 6

Showing the significant difference on provision of tutorial services of A I O U and UK O U

Name of Universities	Number of Items	Mean	S.D	df	Value of t	p- value
UK O U	8	3.6550	.17452			
A I O U	8	3.2363	.31722	14	3.271	0.006

It is evident from Table: 6 that there is a significant difference between the mean score of UKOU and AOIU on tutorial services provided to the students of distance education. It is concluded from above table that UKOU provides better tutorial services to the students.

Table: 7

Opinion of students about counseling Services of student support services

S.No	Statements	Country	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	Mean Score
1	Guidance and counseling services were provided to the students.	UK	44	87	21	33	15	3.56
		Pakistan	11	44	31	69	45	2.54
2	The student guide was helpful to understand the system and to follow the programme systematically.	UK	59	67	15	34	25	3.51
		Pakistan	41	55	23	49	32	3.12
3	Guidance and counseling centre was established in the university.	UK	53	81	15	27	24	3.56
		Pakistan	26	24	35	73	42	2.60
4	Advisory process remained active in providing proper guidance to students in selecting courses.	UK	54	66	17	41	22	3.45
		Pakistan	43	66	21	43	27	3.28
5	Counselors helped the students in their course difficulties.	UK	53	79	13	33	22	3.54
		Pakistan	31	24	25	69	51	2.58
6	There was a provision of telephone counseling in the university.	UK	35	72	13	67	13	3.25
		Pakistan	39	41	44	62	14	3.15
7	Computer assisted career guidance facility was available at	UK	61	79	20	24	16	3.73

the regional office.

		Pakistan	14	36	13	78	59	2.34
8	There is a need of more guidance and counseling provision at the regional office.	UK	51	65	30	39	15	3.49
		Pakistan	66	72	23	25	14	3.76

It is evident from Table: 7 that eight items were taken for counseling services of student support services and on seven items mean score of students from United Kingdom Open University is comparatively better in comparison with the mean score of students of Allama Iqbal Open University, except the statement no.8 there is a need of more guidance and counseling provision at the regional office on which mean score of students of AIOU is better but this statement is about need it also favours the UKOU .The mean score of Students of AIOU is less than 3.00 on the four statement which does not support the statement no. 1 ,3 ,5 , and 7 on Guidance and counseling services were provided to the students, Guidance and counseling centre was established in the university, Counselors helped the students in their course difficulties and Computer assisted career guidance facility was available at the regional office. While the mean score on all the items of UKOU on regional office services is 3.25 to 3.73, this shows that counseling Services offered by UKOU are better than AIOU.

Table: 8
Showing the significant difference on provision of counseling services of A I O U and UK O U

Name of Universities	Number of Items	Mean	S.D	df	Value of t	p- value
UK O U	8	3.5113	.13410			
A I O U	8	2.9212	.48209	14	3.335	0.005

It is evident from Table: 8 that there is a significant difference between the mean score of UKOU and AOIU on counseling services provided to the students of distance education. It is concluded from the above table that UKOU provides better counseling services to the students.

Table: 9
Opinion of students about Media Support of student support services

S.No	Statements	Country	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	Mean Score
1	Open University approach of audio-video and print support was appropriate.	UK	55	72	11	38	24	3.48
		Pakistan	33	65	41	32	29	3.21
2	The time schedule of the media programmes was adequate.	UK	61	73	12	29	25	3.58
		Pakistan	49	61	33	35	22	3.40
3	The schedule of the media programmes was provided in the study package.	UK	69	77	12	20	22	3.76
		Pakistan	64	75	23	26	12	3.77
4	Media programmes were interesting, motivating and	UK	74	72	18	22	14	3.85

	helpful for the students.	Pakistan	66	75	12	35	12	3.74
5	TV educational programmes were relevant to your studies.	UK	59	80	19	32	10	3.73
		Pakistan	33	65	33	51	18	3.22
6	Educational programmes broadcasted through video were helpful for you.	UK	53	80	21	39	7	3.67
		Pakistan	54	66	13	45	22	3.43

It is evident from Table: 9 that six items were taken for media support services of student support services and on five items mean score of students from United Kingdom Open University is comparatively better in comparison with the mean score of students of Allama Iqbal Open University, except the statement no.3 The schedule of the media programmes was provided in the study package on which mean score of students of AIOU is minutely higher by 0.01. Over all on this portion mean score of students of AIOU is not less than 3.21. While the mean score on all the items of UKOU on regional office services is 3.48 to 3.85, this shows that Media Support Services offered by UKOU are better than AIOU.

Table: 10
Showing the significant difference on provision of media support services of AIOU and UKOU

Name of Universities	Number of Items	Mean	S.D	df	Value of t	p- value
UK O U	6	3.6783	.13258			
A I O U	6	3.4617	.24457	10	1.908	0.086

It is evident from Table: 10 that there is no significant difference between the mean score of UKOU and AOIU on media support services provided to the students of distance education.

Table: 11
Opinion of students about Library Services of student support services

S.No	Statements	Country	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	Mean Score
1	The facility of library was available at the regional office/ centre.	UK	56	77	21	34	12	3.66
		Pakistan	21	32	19	76	52	2.47
2	Regional library was equipped with sufficient referenced materials to meet student needs.	UK	55	72	22	36	15	3.58
		Pakistan	24	36	13	71	56	2.51
3	The facility of photocopy was available at the regional library.	UK	66	81	11	29	13	3.79
		Pakistan	15	33	20	77	55	2.38
4	Staff of the regional library cooperates well with the	UK	69	81	15	22	13	3.86

students.								
5	The opportunities were created to involve the students into the discussion on the subject.	Pakistan	15	22	25	77	61	2.27
		UK	63	77	15	34	11	3.74
6	The facility of interaction between student and teacher was provided through correspondence and teleconferencing.	Pakistan	46	62	25	53	14	3.37
		UK	66	75	24	23	12	3.80
7	There is a provision of interaction between the student learner and tutor through e-mail.	Pakistan	45	61	33	36	25	3.33
		UK	55	88	13	32	12	3.71
8	The student record was well maintained by the tutor.	Pakistan	13	22	25	77	63	2.23
		UK	73	82	17	18	10	3.95
		Pakistan	55	76	15	43	11	3.61

It is evident from Table: 11 that eight items were taken for library services of student support services and on all the eight items mean score of students from United Kingdom Open University is comparatively better in comparison with the mean score of students of Allama Iqbal Open University.

The mean score of Students of AIOU is less than 3.00 on the five statements which does not support the statement no. 1 , 2 , 3 ,4 and 7 on The facility of library was available at the regional office/ centre, Regional library was equipped with sufficient referenced materials to meet student needs, The facility of photocopy was available at the regional library, Staff of the regional library cooperates well with the students and There is a provision of interaction between the student learner and tutor through e-mail.

While the mean score on all the items of UKOU on regional office services is 3.58 to 3.95, this shows that Library Services offered by UKOU are better than AIOU.

Table: 12
Showing the significant difference on provision of library services of AIOU and UKOU

Name of Universities	Number of Items	Mean	S.D	df	Value of t	p- value
UK O U	8	3.7613	.11581			
A I O U	8	2.7712	.56448	14	4.859	0.000

It is evident from Table: 12 that there is a significant difference between the mean score of UKOU and AIOU on media support services provided to the students of distance education.

DISCUSSION

On provision of general services the mean score of students of AIOU (Pakistan) is low in comparison with UKOU (United Kingdom), but it is less than 2.50 on assessment and

evaluation system's satisfaction, planning and execution and tutors accustomed to give guidance & encouraged comments on assignments. The mean score of AIOU is also less than 3.00 on information about telecast/teleconferencing was timely provided. It shows that evaluation system, planning and execution, tutors guidance & encourage ness and on provision of information about telecast and teleconferencing AIOU is lagging behind (Table: 1).

There is a highly significant difference on the provision of general services to the students of AIOU and UKOU at 0.001 level. UKOU general services for students are much better than at AIOU.

On provision of regional office services the mean score of students' of AIOU is lower than UKOU, but it is less than 2.50 on whether the counseling process was helpful to the students in solving their study problems, and whether the supplementary/additional books and material were available in the regional office.

The mean score of AIOU is also less than 3.00 on regional offices fully cooperated to meet students' needs, appropriate mass media was used to provide relevant information by the regional campuses and group discussions were held to solve students' problems in the study centre. It shows that counseling process of AIOU is inappropriate, mass media is not being used properly, group discussions were not held and additional supplementary books were not available in the regional offices/campuses (Table: 3).

There is a highly significant difference on the provision of regional office services between AIOU and UKOU at 0.000 level. AIOU has to improve a lot (Table: 4).

On provision of tutorial services the mean score of students of AIOU (Pakistan) is low in comparison to UKOU (United Kingdom), but it is less than 2.50 on Sufficient A.V aids were available at the study centers to meet the student needs and on the all other parameters of the tutorial services the mean score of AIOU is more than 3.00. It shows that Sufficient A.V aids were not available at the study centers AIOU to meet the student needs (Table: 5).

There is a highly significant difference on the provision of tutorial services between AIOU and UKOU at 0.006 level. AIOU has to improve a lot (Table: 6).

On provision of counseling services the mean score of students of AIOU (Pakistan) is low in comparison with UKOU (United Kingdom), but it is less than 2.50 on Computer assisted career guidance facility was available at the regional office, The mean score of AIOU is also less than 3.00 on Guidance and counseling services were provided to the students and Guidance and counseling centre was established in the university & Counselors helped the students in their course difficulties. It shows that computer assisted career guidance counseling is not available at AIOU and as well as Guidance and counseling centre was not established in the AIOU & Counselors did not helped the students in their course difficulties (Table 7). There is a highly significant difference on the provision of counseling services between AIOU and UKOU at 0.005 level. AIOU has to improve a lot (Table: 8).

On provision of media support services the mean score of students of AIOU (Pakistan) is slightly lower in comparison with UKOU (United Kingdom), the mean score of A I O U is slightly better than UKOU on The schedule of the media programmes was provided in the study package. It shows that there is no clear difference on media support services

between both the universities (Table: 9). There is no significant difference on the provision of media support services between AIOU and UKOU at 0.005 levels (Table: 10). On provision of library services the mean score of students of AIOU (Pakistan) is low in comparison with UKOU (United Kingdom), but it is less than 2.50 on the facility of library was available at the regional office/centre, The facility of photocopy was available at the regional library, Staff of the regional library cooperates well with the students, There is a provision of interaction between the student learner and tutor through e-mail.

The mean score of AIOU is also less than 3.00 on Regional library was equipped with sufficient referenced materials to meet student needs, It shows that Facility of library is not available at the regional offices/campuses of AIOU, The facility of photocopy is not available at the regional library, Staff of the regional library did not cooperate well with the students, There is no provision of interaction between the student learner and tutor through e-mail and regional library was not equipped with sufficient referenced materials to meet student needs (Table: 11). There is a highly significant difference on the provision of library services between AIOU and UKOU at 0.000 level (Table: 12).

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the findings following conclusions were made:

- Both universities adopt the same procedure of student support services.
- Student support services of AIOU are developing rapidly on the lines of UKOU.
- Assessment and evaluation system of AIOU is not satisfactory and the tutors do not provide guidance, their attitude towards the students is not encouraging and very seldom does they comments on the student assignments.
- Regional office services provided by AIOU are not up to the mark i.e books were not available, regional offices did not cooperate to meet students' needs.
- In study centres of AIOU sufficient AV aids were not available.
- UKOU regional campuses provide counseling and guidance, career and computer assisted career guidance services to the students while AIOU does not provide such services.
- Though regional campuses of both the universities have the efficient running libraries, yet facilities provided are different. Again UKOU students enjoy more facilities.
- UKOU regional campuses mostly use mass media to provide the different information to the students while AIOU regional campuses less use this media.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the analyzed data and on the basis of findings, following recommendations are made for AIOU.

- Regional campuses may be given independent status as mini university like UKOU campuses.
- Modern communication facilities like toll free phone, voice mailbox, auto answer may be provided at AIOU regional campuses.
- Prompt responses to the student calls may be ensured.

- Daytime, evening and weekend student queries services may be started/ practiced at every regional campus.
- Orientation workshop/ seminar for understanding the system/ courses may be organized in each semester.
- The study centers may be adequately equipped with reference material and audio-visual aids.
- Tutor may be accustomed to giving encouraging comments on assignments.
- Assignments may be returned well in time to the students with detailed instructions.
- Counseling and guidance cell may be established in every regional campus.
- Career guidance and computer assisted career guidance services may be provided at every regional campus.
- Booklet about student support services may be provided to every new student.
- Close contact of regional campuses with press, radio and television maybe ensured.
- Regional library may be equipped with sufficient reference material and audio-visual aids.
- Trained and qualified staff may be appointed at every regional library.
- Learner helpdesk may be established at every regional library on the lines of UKOU.
- Off campus and on campus book borrowing may be allowed.
- Book bank may be founded for needy student at every regional campus.
- Further work and research for upgrading the student support services may be conducted.

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