

ABSTRACT

Title	An Investigation into the Nature and Treatment of Learning Difficulties of Distance Learners at Intermediate Level
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The study was aimed at identifying the learning difficulties faced by the distance learners of AIOU at intermediate level and to explore the existing support provided by the University to its distance learners to overcome the learning difficulties emerged during self-study the textual material and in completing assignments.

The study was descriptive in nature. It was a mixed designed study i.e. both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used for data collection and analysis. The population of the study consisted of three categories: the distance learners, the tutors and the media producers. The sample for the quantitative part was comprised of 1500 distance learners and 800 tutors using stratified and random sampling techniques. It also included all (10) media producers. The qualitative phase includes the sample of 40 distance learners (repeaters) in the four compulsory courses (English, Urdu, Pakistan Studies and Islamic Studies) enrolled in semester spring

2004 at intermediate level. Likewise, 30 tutors and 20 study centres in Punjab province were also drawn for the qualitative design.

Data for the quantitative phase was collected by developing three questionnaires: one for the distance learners, second for the tutors, and third for the media producers. Statements/items were developed at 5-point Likert scale, three point scale, yes/no form and open ended form. Besides, percentage and mean score, one sample t-test was employed to test the six hypotheses of the study.

For qualitative part, interviews were conducted of 40 distance learners and 20 tutors. An observational sheet was also prepared to observe student-tutor interaction in resolving the learning difficulties.

The results revealed that the majority of distance learners faced difficulties in comprehending the textbooks due to multiplicity of concepts ordained in the sentences, lack of proper illustrations in the text and lack of study skills. The textual material was not supplemented with audio and video programs. Lack of time was also a hurdle for the distance learners as they had to study bulky books in short period of one semester. The difficulties in completing assignments were: the difficulties in making notes during self studying the textual material, problems in organization of studied/read material, hurdles in presenting critical analysis of the questions and difficulties in summarizing the answers. The electronic media of AIOU was not playing vital role in resolving learning difficulties of distance learners. Lastly the tutors' role was also non cooperative as most of the tutors did not correct the wrong answers written by the students. Majority of the tutors did not give proper comments on written assignments and did not return checked assignments to their students in time. The study centres did not function properly and the learning difficulties of

distance learners were not properly treated at study centres through tutorial support and electronic media.

The study recommends that i) a workshop may be held for newly enrolled distance learners to make them acquainted with the distance learning system, study skills, scanning/skimming skills, note making skills, summarizing skills, media using skills and tutorials attending skills. ii) the textbooks may be illustrated with graphs, maps, diagrams and updated knowledge/information/data, iii) the textbooks and electronic media may be integrated during development of new courses/programmes, iv) more audio-video programmes may be produced for each course and their cassettes may be posted to the distance learners, v) free telephonic service may be provided to students during transmissions of broadcasts of AIOU so that students' queries may be answered, vi) tutors having teaching experience at FA level may be appointed and their attendance in study centres may be ensured vii) a small sample of Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA) may also be re-checked by the AIOU Faculty to improve marking standard, viii) the study centres may be established where students have an easy access and lastly ix) the University should design make up courses for third divisioners (in SSC) so that doors of the University may be opened for them.