

SWOT ANALYSIS OF M.PHIL EDUCATION PROGRAM OF ALLAMA IQBAL OPEN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The study was aimed at evaluation of M. Phil Education programme of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) through SWOT analysis. It was a descriptive research and was based on various perceptions about the programme. Objectives of study were to assess the strengths of M. Phil Education Programme, to point out the weaknesses of the programme, to identify the opportunity of M. Phil Education program and to analyze the internal & external factors of the programme. It was observed that majority of the student reported that they joined M.Phil Education to enhance their professional qualification and M. Phil Education courses were relevant to their requirements.

Media propagations and extensive campaigns may be launched to disseminate the usefulness of the programs introductory sessions may be arranged before starting the course works in which orientation is provided about writing research papers and assignments. Modern techniques of research should be emphasized and training regarding the application of computer based research may be imparted to the students facility available attitudes of teachers were finding M. Phil program assisted them in evaluation, little financial, new support is available, new universities are threat to AIOU program. It was concluded that the Courses meet the needs of students, workshop planned carefully conducted in friendly way. There is no option of financial support of fee at higher level.

There is no provision of credit hour transfer facility. Keeping in view the conclusions, it is recommended that vast publicity of strengths may be carried out while announcing the admission and more financial support may be provided to the student, measures to meet the threat from emerging university is desirable.

Key words: Strength, weakness, opportunity, threats, M.Phil program

INTRODUCTION

The idea of Distance Education was first mooted in UK in late 60s by the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson.

He was of the view that educational opportunities must be provided to those who might have missed better education due to early employment and who wish to upgrade their knowledge and skills, in their spare times in the evenings at home. The UK Open University was thus established in 1969. Since then, it has become a major institution of learning in UK and has opened up opportunities for millions of working people. It is thought to be the mother of open universities of the world. On the same pattern, the National Education Policy 1972 provided an Open University in Pakistan for the education of those who have been unable to study in the formal system of education due to various responsibilities or early employment (AIOU website).

Allama Iqbal Open University was established in May, 1974, with the main objectives of providing educational opportunities to masses and to those who cannot leave their homes and jobs. In the last 34 years, the University has more than fulfilled this promise. The main campus of the university is situated in sector H-8, Islamabad. Its the second Open University of the world and the first of its kind in Asia and Africa.

The aim of establishing AIOU was to provide affordable and accessible education through distance learning at the door—steps to those who could not continue their education through formal education.

The University (AIOU) operates on semester system and admits students in autumn and spring semester. (Prospectus of AIOU, 2011)The term distance education means that learner and teacher do not usually interact with each other in person face to face situation. This two-way communication can be established using any medium that is available such as; postal or e-mailing, telephonic, fax, radio, television, computer, modems linkage TV or computers, interactive available etc.

History of Distance Education in Pakistan

Since its in 1974 as the AIOU first Open University of Asia ,it was established with act NO.XXXIX by the national assembly of Pakistan and the national educational policy of (1972-80, p.33) describe it in the following words:

Open universities are being used in various countries to provide educational and training to people who cannot leave their home and job for full time studies . An open university will be established to provide part time educational facilities through corresponding courses, tutorials seminars, workshops, laboratories televisions and radio broadcast and others mass communications media.

Allama Iqbal opens University (AIU), (Formally called Peoples Open University) established in 1974 by an Act of parliament. Following are the major objectives stated in the Act (1974 as amended up to 1984)

- To provide facilities to people who cannot leave their homes and jobs in such manners as it may determine.
- To provide such facilities to the masses for their educational uplift as it may determine.
- To provide facilities for the training of teacher in such manner as it may determine.
- To provide instruction in such branches of learning, technology or vocations as it may deem fit.
- To make provisions for research and for the advancements and disseminations of knowledge in such manners as it may determine.
- To hold examinations and to award and confer degree diploma, certificates and others academic distinctions (2002, p.13)

Distance Education system of AIU

AIU is catering to educational needs of the society; Distance education gives greater flexibility in spreading of education. The AIU, being distance education institutions, relies heavily on all varieties of available media to reach its students in effective manners. The main components of its multi media package are:

- Corresponding Materials including self learning study package and supplement study material (readers, textbooks and study guides)
- The Voice of AIU FM radio has been broadcasting educational program on the national frequency of 91.6.
- Satellite transmissions: AIU is putting on air its educational media materials on PTV-2 which is beaming out its transmission through satellite to more than 45 countries across the globe.
- Online teaching: Various regions have already been linked for online education and online classes through teleconferencing have been started for computer science programmes.
- Non-broadcast media includes slides, audiocassettes, fillips charts, and leaflets (generally for basic functional and literary level courses) audio/video cassettes are an integral part of the learning material as well.
- Tutorial instructions through contact sessions and academic guidance facilities at study centers (mostly in afternoons).

- Face to face workshop has been started for courses, requiring practical/lab work or skill development.
- Group training workshop for post graduates programmes, generally at MA/M.SC/M.Phil and PhD
- Course assignments play as instruments of instructions, continuous assessment and general academic guidance of students. These assignments are evaluated by respective tutors.
- Final examination is held for each course at the end of the semesters. (AIOU, Brief, 2011)

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

The origin of the Faculty of Education predates the university itself. National Institute of Education was established in 1973 under the federal Ministry of Education. It became part of the university in June 1975 as Institute of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences. The progressively intending functions of the Institute brought the needs for structural changes in 1984 and it got the status of Faculty of Education.

M.Phil Education Program

Specializations

- Distance and Non-Formal and Continuing Education
- Educational Planning and Management
- Secondary Teacher Education
- Special Education
- Science Education

Aims/Objectives of M.Phil Education Programme

M.Phil in Education programme is designed:

- To prepare scholars who have a grasp over the discipline of Education.
- To establish a cadre of specialists and professionals in different fields of education who can provide effective leadership in guiding and conducting high level research in various fields of national life
- To produce core of professions who can provide leadership in various disciplines.
- To provide an opportunity of higher education and research in the discipline and to develop research potential and promote research activities among professionals.
-

Admission Procedure for M.Phil in Education Programme

- Merit is determined on the basis of educational qualification, experience, score of GRE (General) and interview. The University will call candidates for a test.
 - A test equivalent to GRE(General) fore on M.Phil equivalent degree. The test is organized by AIOU through National Testing Service.(NTS)

- Interview is meant to evaluate the candidate's self-concept, confidence and critical thinking and is conducted by the concerned department.
- Selected candidates are intimated by the Directorate of Admission with the advice to deposit fee according to the schedule.

Eligibility

Applicants for MS/M. Phil. (with all above mention specialization) M.A Education (at least 2nd division) or M. Ed (at least 2nd division) or M.S. Ed (at least 2nd division) and M.A EPM

Note: only those candidate get admission in M.Phil EPM and Science Education having the Master Degree in EPM and In Science Education. Admission is strictly be made on merit basis as per approved criteria.

Programme Structure

Compulsory course of the M.phil Education of all .discipline which student take in first semester Core Courses 9 credit hours

S. No	Courses	Credit Hours
1	Trends and Issues in Education (3701)	3
2	Computer Applications in Education (3705)	3
3	Advanced Course on Educational Research and Statistics (3706)	3

NB: one Course of 3 credit hour , student take from their own specialization as:

S. No	Courses	Specialization
1	Trends and Issues in Teacher Education (3704)	Teacher Education
2	Trends and Issues in Special Education (3709)	Special Education
3	Trends and Issues in Distance and Non formal Education (3703)	Distance Education
4	Trends and Issues in EPM (3702)	EPM
5	Trends and Issues in Science Education (6771)	Science Education

B. Specialization (Distance and Non-formal Education)

Core Courses

12credit hours

S. No	Courses		Credit Hours
1.	Non Formal Education-I (3726)	Cluster-A	3
	Non Formal Education-II (3727)		3
2.	Adult Education/Literacy-I (3728)	Cluster-B	3
	Adult Education/Literacy-II (3729)		3
3.	Educational Technology-I (3730)	Cluster-C	3
	Educational Technology-II (3731)		3
4.	Distance Education-I (3732)	Cluster-D	3
	Distance Education-II (3733)		3

(Specialization Educational Planning and Management)

S. No	Courses	Credit Hours
1.	Advance Course on Educational Planning-I (3707)	3
2.	Advance Course on Educational Planning-II (3708)	3
3.	Advance Course on Educational Management-I (3734)	3
4.	Advance Course on Educational Management-II (3735)	3
5.	Research Project 3+3 Credit Hours (1786)	6

(Specialization in Secondary Teacher Education)

S. No	Courses	Credit Hours
1.	Advance approaches to Curriculum Development-I (3736)	3
	Advance approaches to Curriculum Development-II (3737)	3
2.	Teaching Strategies-I (3739)	3
	Teaching Strategies-II (3740)	3

(Specialization in Special Education)

S. No	Courses	Credit Hours
1	Advance Study on Exceptionalities-I (3716)	3
2	Advance Study on Exceptionalities-II (3717)	3
3	Career Planning and Rehabilitation-I (3718)	3
4	Career planning and Rehabilitation-II (3719)	3

(Specialization in Science Education)

S. No	Courses	Credit Hours
1.	Curriculum Development in science Education (6775)	3
2.	Assessment and Evaluation in Science Education (6774)	3
3.	Teaching Strategies in Science Education (6773)	3
4.	ICTs in Science Education (6772)	3

For the successful completion of 8 courses of M.Phil Education, students under take 4 compulsory courses, whereas 4 courses are elective. Research project is equivalent to 2 courses. All the courses are 3 credit hours i.e. comprises of 9 units and having the following requirements: Systematic study of the Correspondence material. The submission of two assignments within specific period.

Participation in one week intensive workshop on successful completion of the assignments.

To pass the external examination at the end of workshop. Basic principle of the programme is self-learning and units of corresponding material are roughly designed for a week study.

The self-study material contains self-assessment questions, which help the students to analyze their progress in education courses. In M.Phil Education courses, enrolled students receive information about the nominated tutors through intimation letter and the self-learning study packages (textbooks, supplementary study material, general student guide, course guide and assignments question papers).

Students study their reading material; prepare assignments for submission to the tutors for periodic evaluation and guidance for preparation of final examination. Tutors assess the progress and judge student's learning capability through assignments. The tutorial meetings are not offered in M.Phil Education courses. For course workshop, the course coordinator invites the students who had successfully completed their assignments in a given semester. Course workshop is conducted at the end of each semester in the main campus. This is compulsory component of the M.Phil Education courses. This workshop strengthens the student's concepts through the face-to-face learning process. Teaching Faculty and other resource persons conduct the sessions of workshops. These personnel possess expertise in distance education to share their knowledge and skills with students. In this respect, the assessment of M.Phil Education students is based on assignments and workshop. In short, the course paper standard is based on internal assessment of the students as well as external assessment.

SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT analysis is one of the modern techniques to evaluate an organization or a programme. SWOT stands for Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threats. Strength and Weaknesses are identified from within the organization or programme whereas Opportunities and threats are identified from within the organization or program %e. The unit of programming is of crucial importance for an educational unit. It designates the route that particular kinds of unit will pursue in future, and it plays the role of a compass by determining the boundaries of goals by preparing organizations to follow a certain direction. (Athanasoula-Reppa et al, 1999)

We can conclude that eventually these goals express the missions of every organization and what is prepared to follow is actually the step of co-coordinators that lead to its effective operation through achievements of its goals. A positive step towards this direction is considered to be the importance that is given to a harmonic co-operation of the organization's members, surely with adding's of actions in order the best positive outcome. (Saitis, 2005)

Programming in educational units, as it systematically happen in all kinds of organizations, normally takes two possible forms. It may be either functional or strategic depending on the management level that is implemented and the time horizon of the goals that are set in terms of its duration. (Athanasoula-reppa et al. 1999). The situation is that, strategic management SWOT (Strength weaknesses/opportunities/threats) always survives as a fundamental methodology for formulating a company's the firm's strategy.

SWOT analysis is familiar and easily understandable technique by users and it provides good structuring devices for sorting all ideas about its future and an organizations ability to exploit that future.

In its most simplistic form, a SWOT analysis leads to one of the four major conclusions (Sherman, Rowley and Armandy 2007)

- Strengths outweigh weaknesses, opportunities outweigh threats – Supports a growth strategy
- Strengths outweigh weaknesses, threats outweigh opportunities – Supports a maintenance strategy.
- Weaknesses outweigh strengths, opportunities outweigh Threats – supports a vast strategy.
- Weaknesses outweigh strengths, Threats outweigh opportunities – supports a harness strategy.

Use of SWOT Analysis

The usefulness of SWOT analysis is not limited to profit- seeking organizations. SWOT analysis may be used in any decision-making situation. When a desired end-State (Objectives) has been defined Example include: non-Profit organizations, governmental units, and individuals SWOT analysis may also be used in pre- crises planning and preventive analysis management. SWOT analysis may also be used in creating a recommendation during an inability study/ survey.

On its own, it is said that a SWOT analysis is meaningless. It works best when part of an overall strategy or in a given context or situation. This strategy may be as simple as:

1. Goal or objective
2. SWOT analysis
3. Evaluation or measures of success strategy
4. Action

Advantages of SWOT Analysis

Following are the major advantages of using SWOT analysis to evaluate some organization or its performance.

1. Simple four box framework
2. Helps understanding of an organization strengths and weaknesses
3. Encourages the development of strategic thinking
4. Helps focus on the organization's strengths and build on opportunities that are identified
5. Enables organizations to anticipate future threats and take steps to reduce the impact of these on the objective.
6. Allows an organization to identify opportunities and exploit them fully. (www.beecoop.co.uk) (retrieved on 12 -10-2012)

Disadvantages of SWOT Analysis

Before the start of evaluation of an organization's performance or uses the outcomes of the evaluation through SWOT Analysis, it is very important to understand that like all other techniques, SWOT also has some disadvantages. This does not reduce the importance and significance of SWOT Analysis but keeping the following disadvantages makes it easy for managers to beware of the slips and difficulties in carrying out SWOT Analysis.

1. Can be over simplified and decisions made with insufficient data
2. Should be regularly carried out to be effective
3. Requires the input of different people from different perspectives
4. Relies on quality data which may be difficult to obtain. Relies on assumptions about external factors which may be incorrect
5. May miss key issues
(www.beecoop.co.uk)

GENERAL FACTORS IN SWOT ANALYSIS

A SWOT Analysis connects internal and external factors that affect a company. It matches the strengths of a company's internal environment with opportunities in the external environment. In general, here are some of the areas that should be considered in conducting a SWOT Analysis.

Internal Factors

It is to be explored whether certain factors are strengths or weaknesses in operation of the organization under consideration. These factors include product quality, Ownership structure, Quality of the management team, Brand name, Location, Clear vision and objectives, Availability of cash for growth, and Quality of marketing and sales efforts of the organization.

External Factors

External factors may include Declining market, Problems with suppliers, location/ facility, quality of available labor, technology, and governmental regulations.

It is to also to be noted that a number of other factors may be included in or excluded from the above mentioned list depending upon a particular organization or business. (How to develop a SWOT Analysis, (www.lationoffice.com))

PERFORMING SWOT-KEY QUESTIONS

Keeping these factors in mind, the following important questions may be considered in order to identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats for SWOT Analysis of an organization.

Strengths

Strengths include the advantages that the organization has, things that the organization does better than other, or any unique or lowest-cost resources that organization can draw upon what others can't. It also includes the perception of people in the market as what they feel the strengths of the organization or if there is anything as the unique selling proposition (USP) of the organization.

Weaknesses

As far the weaknesses are concerned they simply include what the stakeholders feel they could improve or what they should avoid. There are many factors that people in the market may be taking as weaknesses of the organization or the factors that cause the organization losing its sales.

All such items can be considered as weaknesses of the organization.

Opportunities

Opportunities are related to the factors outside the organization that are in benefit of the organization or the stakeholders in future. They include any interesting trends that the organization is aware of, any positive changes in technology and markets on both a broad and narrow scale, or any favorable changes in government policy related to a particular field.

Opportunities also may be associated with changes in social patterns, population profiles, lifestyle or any particular supporting local events.

Threats

Threats are actually the obstacles that organization may face. It sometimes depends on what the competitors: sometimes the quality standard or specification for the organizations products or services may change. Similarly any change in technology may also be threatening the position of an organization. A bad debt or cash –flow, or any of the weaknesses of the organization may also seriously threaten the business.

SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE M .PHIL EDUCATION OF AIUO

Internal strengths

Firstly, the admission criterion of the programme is quite strict. A student is supposed to appear in GRE test before he/she applies for the admission. The certificates of educational achievements of students go through rigorous screening and different marks are allocated to different levels of achievement.

A student has to go through an interview by a highly qualified team of the department, where his/her overall abilities are judged by the department personnel. The team is also supposed to control quality of the graduates so that only those are selected who really deserve to be M.Phil Education graduate. The merit list is made keeping in view the educational qualifications and overall personality of the student.

A person is chosen to be an M.Phil graduate who really deserves to be called an Education graduate. The course of study is designed to ensure preliminary study of the course material and gives student ample opportunities to study on their own while conducting research thesis. The course work is self written by the highly qualified personnel of the Education Faculty who know demands of the society and field of education. Course work is written keeping in view the new trends in educational field.

The university has its own production unit where study material is produced. This method of production is cost efficient. Course material formulated is need based (i.e. it is selected keeping in mind the need of the society and education. Basic course work gives the student knowledge and skills which could be implemented in daily routine of working individuals. Academia are qualified professionals who are not only academically strong but also bring along a variety of experiences male is transferred to students real life situation. The resource persons have clarity of concepts which they try to transfer to students. They bring with them additional information other than books to provide the students with the real life situations. In relation to education some of the teachers use IT to transfer the knowledge to the student which is indeed a plus point.

Another important component of the course is assignment component. The assignments are sent to the students based on the questions given from the book and some open ended questions are given as well so that the students can conduct some research on their own as well. The questions are based on the Bloom's Taxonomy where a certain percentage is given from the book and some open ended questions are given where the students are given opportunities to consult libraries and the internet, to answer the questions. This way a student gets an informal training to conduct research. By searching on the internet they students get exposure to the write ups of different levels of writers and researchers. Students are thus exposed to new ways and techniques of research. There are some external factors which contribute to the strengths of a programme which includes resource persons and students.

Weaknesses

After observing strengths of the programme, it would be justified to mention some of the weaknesses observed. There is flexibility in the programme which is an advantage by the students. The flexibility, though, a strength of the system becomes the weakness. There is less face to face interaction between students and teacher which hinders the process of learning as in formal system of education a student comes in contact with the teacher every day. The workshop is conducted for six days which is not enough to answer all queries of the students.

Opportunities

Students who pass out from the programme get adjusted will well reputed organizations NGOs working in Pakistan prefer graduates of Open University as these are highly motivated as compared to the students of other universities. New job opportunities are given to graduates of the programme.

Threats

Threats that are faced by this programme are new emerging universities which facilitate admissions on flexible terms. Strict admission criteria of the university, though a strength, can also be termed as a threat to the university. Students leaving abroad become a threat for the university. Centralization of the work one end giving is ensuring quality education, but on the other threats for the graduates.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess strengths of M.Phil Education program
2. To point out weaknesses of M.Phil Education program
3. To find out threats of M. Phil Education program
4. To identify the opportunity of the M. Phil Education program

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study will lead to the better understanding of the student, and faculty of AIOU. The overall impact of this study would be important in the field of education to understand the importance of the M.Phil Education program. It would be helpful in improving the quality of training by designing the instructional strategies taken into account the needs, interests and problems faced by M.Phil education graduates. In addition the data generated by this study would be useful for other training agencies/organizations and faculty providing training to the planners and managers to compare their functions with education program of AIOU and improve them in the light of findings of this study.

METHODOLOGY

The population the study comprises

(e i.) all 182 student of all discipline of the M.Phil Education program. All 21 faculty member of education faculty. Two detailed questionnaire were developed one for student and other for faculty. The questionnaire comprises the all necessary aspect of SWOT analysis of Education program .The data collected by using percentage and mean score method.

CONCLUSION

Following conclusions were drawn on the basis of findings.

Strengths

The analysis concluded that the AIOU was catering to the educational needs of students. After completion of the programme, student enjoys same values as graduates of other universities. Workshops were properly being organized, attitude of the teachers was friendly.

Weaknesses

Low check over evaluated assignments less facility of transfer of credits and availability of little financial facility are the weaknesses.

Opportunities

Vast field of clientele; more students can be catered to in the M.Phil Education Program

Threats

Emerging universities and their M.Phil programs and continuous changing of it is threats.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of conclusion the researchers recommended:

- The courses M. Phil Education need to be improving according to the new trends and need. There may be a specialized training for resource persons to use IT.
- During workshops, participants, involvement may be maximized and instead of lecturing presentations, group discussions, debates and demonstrations be introduced to increase practicability of the program.
- There might be a check over evaluated assignment. Further research might be conducted related to the M.Phil Education program and about its effectiveness.
- Media propagation and extensive campaigns may be launched /initiated to attract and encourage the young human capital to join the discipline Education program.
- Faculty staff may be increased as per emerging demands for the training of educational planners/managers: this may include one professor, two associate professors, four assistant professors, eight lecturers and programme coordinator for each programme.

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