

## **FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TOWARDS DROP OUT IN M.PHIL AT ALLAMA IQBAL OPEN UNIVERSITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Drop out refers to the phase when a student is not able to complete the program of degree within the specified time. The danger of drop out is very serious in any education system including distance education. This article highlights major factors causing drop out at M.Phil level in Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Pakistan. Allama Iqbal Open University is the only chartered Distance Education University which caters for over 1.3 million students across the country. The study aimed at finding various factors leading to drop out of students in different faculties at AIOU which offer M.Phil programs. It also aimed to find out differences of drop out rate among male and female students. The research is basically quantitative in nature with a survey design. The population of the study included all the drop out of M.Phil programs offered at AIOU. The sample consisted of total 101 students from three faculties i.e., Education, Social Sciences and Science 2012 session. The M.Phil prospectus of AIOU focuses on four main factors i.e., assignments, workshops, final exams, and thesis which need to be successfully completed for the award of degree in the program. These four factors were focused to develop an online questionnaire to collect data. Descriptive statistics, t-test and ANOVA were used for data analysis. The results indicated that the major factor of drop out across the three faculties was thesis. The findings further revealed no difference in the drop out rate of male and female M.Phil students due to assignments, workshop, and final exams whereas thesis remained the only factor which showed significant difference on the basis of gender, where more male students dropped out than females. To minimize dropout due to thesis, reforms need to be brought in the conduct of M.Phil research workshop at AIOU focusing specific criteria for monitoring the progress of M.Phil students during synopsis development and research work period and the contribution of supervisor in terms of time and commitment towards the supervisee. Further implementation of the prescribed criteria may be ensured by the academic administration and relevant departments of the three faculties offering M.Phil program at AIOU.

**Keywords:** Assignments, Workshop, Final Exams, Thesis, Distance Education, AIOU.

## INTRODUCTION

Distance education as an alternate mode of learning is becoming very popular globally for it is considered as a useful strategy of instruction. National Reporting System (NRS) implementation guidelines indicate distance learning education as a mode of learning where the teachers and students are isolated by time and geology (or both) for most of their study or instructional period. Distance education strategy encourages students to think and study at their own choice and ease, any topic or learning point at any place (home or workplace) at any time without having direct contact with the teacher. The distance education programs offer the courses for the ease of the learners who face difficulty in face-to-face learning and consider correspondence the best source for continuing their education especially at higher level. However, there are certain sessions which are to be taken face to face during each course duration. These sessions are for learners to have discussions with their educators regarding study issues. The educators advise and encourage the learners in such sessions. Hence distance education provides the learners opportunity to overcome the hurdles they face during study.

Despite all its positive effects and role in education, the distance system of education, like any other education system, is facing many challenges like financial problems, family obligations, employment hours or health problems. Brown, Hughes, Keppell, Hard and Smith (2015) identified challenges faced by distance education students and broke down the challenges into three sub-categories: individual, instructional, and institutional. Drop out is also a challenge that is in the form of student withdrawal, non-completing the process of, and may be leaving the course unfinished are the usual terms which are used by educational institutions to reveal students leaving an institution before the completion of a course or a program of study. So, drop out is one of the major challenges of distance education programs. Many students are not able to complete their degrees within the given time duration and leave their program at beginning, middle or ending stage. There are multiple factors which lead to drop out of the students whether during the semester or the inability of the students to finish their programs within the time frame. It is the policy of Higher Education Commission (HEC) that if a student does not finish M.Phil program during five years, he/she has to take re-admission in that program. These Open Distance Learning (ODL) frameworks have possibility of drop out changing and affecting the stakeholders. To reduce drop out ratio, a study is required to know the causes first. After that some remedies may be presented to uproot the factors which are responsible for drop out.

It is revealed through various research studies that drop out factor is not solo. These factors may appear in multiple forms but Colclough, Rose and Tembon(2000); Sabates, Westbrook, Akyeampong & Hunt (2010) studied that the main factor causing maximum drop out is economic one that is the inability of the student to pay fee, purchase educational necessities, arrange transport etc. Economic factor is not the single major factor but there are others which weakens this education system. Distance education system has various shortcomings i.e., no direct contact with teachers, weak structure, lack of interactions, security issues especially for females and individual differences of learners. These shortcomings result in serious issues which need to be addressed.

Simpson (2003) came up with the findings that learners could maintain themselves progressively in distance education mode while overcoming the issues like inappropriate evaluation, institutional financing, and learner's own emphasis on the program. The decrease in new enrollment is also the result of drop out. The reason of decrease in students' strength in the past decade in Hong Kong Open University (HKOU) is again the increase in drop out rate. Various

research studies on drop out reasons in distance education programs revealed insight into the areas which are of institutional concern, i.e., revision of study material, course delivery or learner support. The HKOU is also concentrating on the causes leading to increase in drop out and the ways to minimize its level. Whatever the issues are, they need to be dealt with intelligently holding the learner in the program till the final exam or completion stage.

There are various terms used by schools when the students leave school or college without completion of their selected course or program i.e., ceasing, withdrawal, drop out, trimming down, drainage, wastage, and student mortality. In different type of examinations, these terms have been considered very kind expressions to give reasons for drop out. According to Vergidis & Panagiotakopoulos, 2002, these are not the only causes of students' drop out but there are various other reasons which lay an outstanding burden e.g., early marriage, health issues, family problems and lack of interest in studies are the multiple variables responsible for drop out of students.

It is an acknowledged fact that the problem of drop out is a serious one and may be solved by taking certain measures. But before that it is also very crucial to study and minimize the causes of drop out. The drop out cases experienced and observed in higher education programs especially in M.Phil programs of distance education need to be studied. The studies report that many students get themselves enrolled in M.Phil program and not all of them complete their degree and leave during the program due to various factors. Most of the students are not in the position to address their issues and reasons hampering their course of studies. They find themselves helpless in this regard. Undoubtedly the role of these factors in causing students' drop out is very crucial. The question of finding the reason and eliminating it is the responsibility of teaching institutions. The regular institutions have their own issues and factors contributing towards students' drop out and distance education programs have their own shortcomings. It is necessary for the survival of distance education systems and the promotion of higher education programs that such reasons may be found and answered properly. Hence, it is of vital importance to investigate the factors which lead to the drop out of students and suggest ways to minimize these factors so the students may be motivated to retain and complete their programs on time.

Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is a distance education institution which is providing students from across the country an opportunity to enroll in a variety of programs i.e., undergraduate, graduate, master's degrees, M.Phil and Ph.D degrees in various disciplines. Moreover, teacher training programs and other life skills courses are also offered to prepare the workforce for the country's economic and social uplift. M.Phil program is a degree of higher education which is offered by AIOU following a complete admission procedure of submission of application, entry test and interview. The students on merit are enrolled in the program of study. The study procedures follow English as a medium of instruction. The components of program are assignments, workshop, final exams, research thesis. For each three-credit hour course, two assignments with timely submission to tutor are compulsory. Passing marks are 50 percent. For each course, a weeklong workshop is mandatory at the main campus, Islamabad. Qualifying students are those who successfully participate in the workshop. Another important factor is examination in which the student has to appear and score passing marks in cumulative 24 credit hour courses. After that research thesis need to be completed. Consequently, in this whole procedure, students may drop out at any stage. M.Phil programs are offered by faculty of Science, Social Sciences, Education and Arabic/IS in multiple disciplines at AIOU.

The present study explores the factors responsible for the drop out of students at M.Phil programs of AIOU, Islamabad. The term drop out in this study is considered as a negative one as many students discontinue their educational goal due to certain reasons. The study is comparative in nature and highlights the factors contributing the most in the drop out rate of M.Phil students of different faculties offering this program at AIOU.

### Objectives

The objectives of the research study were to:

1. Investigate the contributing factors for drop out rate of M.Phil students at AIOU.
2. Assess the difference in factors leading to drop out at M.Phil level in the faculties at AIOU.
3. Identify the drop out difference on the basis of contributing factors in male and female students at M.Phil level in AIOU.

### Research Questions

1. What is the number of students 'dropout at M.Phil level because of assignment factor?
1. How many students dropped out in M.Phil due to workshop factor?
1. What is the number of students who left M.Phil program due to failure in final exam?
1. How many M.Phil students dropped out of the program because of incomplete thesis?

### Hypotheses

1. H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference between the students' drop out rate in faculties offering M.Phil programs at AIOU.
2. H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference between the drop out rates of male and female students in different faculties offering M. Phil program at AIOU.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was descriptive in nature with survey research design. The population of the study constituted all the students enrolled in these faculties for M.Phil programs: i.e., Education, Sciences, Social Sciences and Arabic/IS. All the drop out of first three faculties of the session 2012 were taken as sample using purposive sampling technique. The faculty of Arabic/IS was not included as they had no drop out students during this session.

Table 1. Sample of the study

| Sr. No. | Faculties       | Dropped out students |
|---------|-----------------|----------------------|
| 1       | Education       | 47                   |
| 2       | Social Sciences | 31                   |
| 3       | Sciences        | 23                   |
| 4       | Arabic / I.S    | 0                    |
|         | Total           | 101                  |

The study adopted an online questionnaire as tool to get the desired data.

### Instrumentation

A questionnaire was developed by the researcher in consultation with the supervisor. The faculty members gave their expert opinion for validating the tool. Necessary changes were made in the

questionnaire according to the observations of the experts and the tool was finalized for administration on the sample. The desired data was collected through this online questionnaire which was on 5-point Likert scale consisting of 53 items and one open ended item.

The main constructs on which the questionnaire was developed were workshop, assignments, final exams, and thesis. The sub constructs were medium of instructions or guidance, passing rate, boundaries of research work, time issues, technical issues, family issues and behavior of research advisor.

### Validity

The Head of Departments of three faculties' i.e., Education, Sciences and Social Sciences were consulted for opinion on validity of the questionnaire. The first draft consisted of 65 indicators according to four main factors of drop out which were later reduced to 51 indicators after expert opinions. Many items were deleted due to repetition and irrelevance to the area of study.

### Reliability

To check the reliability of the tool, questionnaire was administered on 10 drop out students of M.Phil enrolled in session 2011 after the validation of the instrument. The value of Cronbach's alpha was 0.842.

### Data Collection

An online questionnaire was mailed to total 101 students who dropped out in session 2012 of the following faculties: Education, Science and Social Sciences. There was no drop out in this session in the faculty of Arabic/IS. The filled questionnaires were received from 96 respondents.

## ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

The table2 reflects the mean scores and standard deviations in ascending order of the indicators related to each factor. It depicts the responses of all 96 respondents of the study on multiple indicators which contributed to gauge the reasons of drop out related to assignments, workshop, final exams and thesis factors.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of factors wise indicators n 51

| Factors     | Indicators  | Mean | .D   |
|-------------|---|------|------|
| Assignments | 1. Rephrasing to avoid plagiarism                         | .84  | .453 |
|             | 2. Relevance of material to assignments                   | .03  | .504 |
|             | 3. Accessing relevant data                                | .14  | .419 |
|             | 4. Searching relevant material from other sources         | .23  | .625 |
|             | 5. Length of answers according to the required word limit | .45  | .055 |
|             | 6. Justification of marks                                 | .86  | .319 |

|                    |   |     |      |
|--------------------|---|-----|------|
|                    | 7. Understanding the questions of assignments                     | .24 | .464 |
|                    | 8. Availing all possible assignments attempts                     | .41 | .202 |
| <b>Workshop</b>    | 1. Possessing required ICT skills                                 | .58 | .327 |
|                    | 2. Professional obligations                                       | .58 | .327 |
|                    | 3. Family problems  | .68 | .469 |
|                    | 4. Internet accessibility   | .76 | .288 |
|                    | 5. Family assistance in attending the workshops                   | .80 | .890 |
|                    | 6. Convenience of workshop venue                                  | .91 | .392 |
|                    | 7. Behavior of teachers   | .94 | .320 |
|                    | 8. Medium of instruction  | .22 | .836 |
|                    | 9. Availability of teachers                                       | .30 | .728 |
|                    | 10. Financial problems  | .31 | .059 |
|                    | 11. Accommodation availability                                    | .39 | .749 |
|                    | 12. Presence in workshops   | .44 | .367 |
|                    | 13. Availing all possible workshop attempts                       | .49 | .161 |
| <b>Final Exams</b> | 1. Passing papers in second attempt                               | .68 | .262 |
|                    | 2. Compatibility of examination date sheet with personal schedule | .03 | .298 |
|                    | 3. Percentage in the course work                                  | .14 | .844 |
|                    | 4. Convenient location of examination center                      | .41 | .749 |
|                    | 5. Environment at the examination center                          | .44 | .763 |
|                    | 6. Job related problem during exams                               | .59 | .695 |
|                    | 7. Attempting paper according to the requirement of the questions | .74 | .573 |
|                    | 8. Passing the paper in first attempt                             | .75 | .675 |

|               |                                    |   |             |             |
|---------------|------------------------------------|---|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Thesis</b> | 9.                                 | Solving the paper in English                            | <b>.79</b>  | <b>.593</b> |
|               | 1.                                 | Availing all the possible extensions                    | <b>.42</b>  | <b>.054</b> |
|               | 2.                                 | Taking extensions                                       | <b>.47</b>  | <b>.030</b> |
|               | 3.                                 | Clearing Research Proposal Committee (in first attempt) | <b>.50</b>  | <b>.095</b> |
|               | 4.                                 | Guidance in selection of research topic                 | <b>.52</b>  | <b>.205</b> |
|               | 5.                                 | Referring case to the hardship committee                | <b>.55</b>  | <b>.270</b> |
|               | 6.                                 | Identification of research problem                      | <b>.65</b>  | <b>.119</b> |
|               | 7.                                 | Identification of related articles to research topic    | <b>.65</b>  | <b>.119</b> |
|               | 8.                                 | Analyzing the data                                      | <b>.67</b>  | <b>.232</b> |
|               | 9.                                 | Guidance from the supervisor                            | <b>.70</b>  | <b>.922</b> |
|               | 10.                                | Data tabulation   | <b>.73</b>  | <b>.105</b> |
|               | 11.                                | Cost of data collection                                 | <b>.73</b>  | <b>.157</b> |
|               | 12.                                | Time management during thesis work                      | <b>.76</b>  | <b>.196</b> |
|               | 13.                                | Delayed submission of thesis                            | <b>.81</b>  | <b>.331</b> |
|               | 14.                                | Difficulty in report writing                            | <b>.85</b>  | <b>.307</b> |
|               | 15.                                | Timely feedback from supervisor                         | <b>.87</b>  | <b>.373</b> |
|               | 16.                                | Instrument development                                  | <b>.96</b>  | <b>.224</b> |
|               | 17.                                | Data collection   | <b>.96</b>  | <b>.157</b> |
|               | 18.                                | Effectiveness guidance by supervisor                    | <b>.70</b>  | <b>.922</b> |
|               | 19.                                | Availability of supervisor                              | <b>.04</b>  | <b>.208</b> |
|               | 20.                                | Compatibility with supervisor                           | <b>.21</b>  | <b>.419</b> |
| 21.           | ICT competence skills for research | <b>.25</b>  | <b>.466</b> |             |

Table 3. Frequency distribution of drop out due to assignment, workshop, final exams, and thesis factors according to faculties

| Faculty        | Assignments |    | Workshop |    | Final exams |    | Thesis |    | Total |     |
|----------------|-------------|----|----------|----|-------------|----|--------|----|-------|-----|
|                | F           | %  | F        | %  | F           | %  | F      | %  | F     | %   |
| Education      | 04          | 8  | 5        | 11 | 13          | 28 | 25     | 53 | 47    | 100 |
| Science        | 04          | 21 | 02       | 10 | 0           | 0  | 13     | 68 | 19    | 100 |
| Social Science | 03          | 10 | 07       | 23 | 06          | 20 | 14     | 46 | 30    | 100 |
| Grand Total    | 11          |    | 14       |    | 19          |    | 52     |    | 96    |     |

Table 3 shows the frequencies of drop out students in M.Phil program according to four common factors among the three faculties. In Education, 53% students dropped out during thesis, 28% students dropped out during final exams, 11% students dropped out during workshop and 8% during assignments. In the faculty of Science 68% dropped out at thesis stage, 21% students dropped out at the stage of assignments, 10% dropped out during workshop and none of the students drop out was due to final exams. In faculty of Social Sciences, 46% students dropped out at the stage of thesis, 23% in workshop, 20% in final exams and only 03% students dropped out during assignments. Therefore, thesis is revealed to be the most pertinent factor of drop out across the three faculties i.e., Education, Science and Social Sciences at AIOU.

Table 4. Faculty wise difference according to factors of drop out

| Factors     | Faculties       | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F     | Sig. |
|-------------|-----------------|----------------|----|-------------|-------|------|
| Assignment  | Education       | 230.662        | 2  | 115.311     | 3.448 | .039 |
|             | Science         |                |    |             |       |      |
|             | Social Sciences |                |    |             |       |      |
| Workshop    | Education       | 402.897        | 2  | 201.448     | 2.994 | .055 |
|             | Science         |                |    |             |       |      |
|             | Social Science  |                |    |             |       |      |
| Final Exams | Education       | 802.223        | 2  | 401.111     | 3.794 | .026 |
|             | Science         |                |    |             |       |      |
|             | Social Science  |                |    |             |       |      |
| Thesis      | Education       | 405.214        | 2  | 202.607     | 1.655 | .201 |
|             | Science         |                |    |             |       |      |
|             | Social Science  |                |    |             |       |      |

p < .05



Table 4 reveals results of ANOVA applied to calculate the significant difference between the drop out rates of M.Phil students in three faculties based on the four factors. The results indicated significant difference in the drop out rate among the faculties based on assignments, workshop, and final exams whereas no significant difference was found among the faculties according to thesis factor. Thesis remained the common factor of dropout at M.Phil level across all faculties.

Table 5. Gender difference in drop out regarding assignments, workshop, final exams, and thesis factors

| Factors     | Gender | N  | df | t     | p    |
|-------------|--------|----|----|-------|------|
| Assignments | Male   | 61 | 94 | .313  | .775 |
|             | Female | 35 |    |       |      |
| Workshops   | Male   | 61 | 94 | .243  | .809 |
|             | Female | 35 |    |       |      |
| Exams       | Male   | 56 | 85 | 1.521 | .132 |
|             | Female | 31 |    |       |      |
| Thesis      | Male   | 35 | 52 | .955  | .344 |
|             | Female | 19 |    |       |      |

$p < .05$

Table 5 depicts difference in dropout rate based on gender. The result of the table reveals that there is a significance difference between the male and female students in assignments, workshop, final exams and thesis therefore  $H_{02}$  was rejected. Overall, the dropout rate was more in male students. The dropout occurred at workshop, final exams and thesis stage. Out of 96 students, 8 students dropped out at workshop stage. 87 appeared in final exams. 33 could not clear this component and only 54 entered thesis stage.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The study was conducted with an aim to identify the responsible factors which lead to the dropout rate of students at M.Phil level in AIOU.

The research identified four factors i.e., assignments, workshop, final exams, and thesis. These were found as the major factors which resulted in the drop out of students at M.Phil level across three faculties at AIOU. On the account of these four main factors, the reasons for drop out of students were lack of vocabulary and difficulty in rephrasing stage at thesis. Another cause was insufficient reading material provided by the university. Moreover, the students also reported to face difficulty in accessing web material to complete their assignments. In addition to these, students also left the program unfinished due to their financial and professional pressures, failure in exams, family responsibilities and lack of ICT related skills. Further lack of supervisor's guidance during synopsis and thesis stages also proved a reason of drop out. Topic selection issues at thesis stage were also reported as cause of drop out along with distance of examination center from residence. In addition to these, lack of basic skills in English language, inability to

maintain balance between work, study and family commitments, feelings of isolation and attendance issues in workshop were also the reasons of leaving the program unfinished.

A research study at Indira Gandhi National Open University, India by Fozdar, Kumar and Kannan (2006) revealed similar findings as the students in their study were also unable to submit assignments by due time. The study also confirms the same results as family issues, professional pressures, language skill barrier, problem in rephrasing topic of thesis and assignments as main causes of drop out along with the lack of supervisory guidance.

Further the students in the present study regarded distance of examination center from their location as an issue which resulted in failure to take the final exams as a student reported that he dropped out because he could not reach the examination center in time. In interview, another student said that thesis was the main reason of drop out. This happened because the student could not select the topic and therefore develop the synopsis in time. Moreover, for some students 'data analysis proved difficult, therefore, thesis was not submitted on time and resultantly the student dropped out of the program.

A research study related to drop out factors was conducted by Mohammad and El Masri (2012) on "Factors Affecting Drop outs Students in Arab Open University- Bahrain Branch". The results supported the present study that non submission of assignments is one of the reasons of drop out. Secondly, another factor that joins hand in these causes of drop out is workshop component which showed that workshop centers were too far away from the residence of the students. That is why students could not reach the venue and ultimately gave up the pursuit of degree. Thirdly, this study showed that difficulty in passing the term-end examination paper was another important reason of drop out which may be attributed to lack of exam preparation on the part of students.

The findings which highlighted the assignment factor as responsible of drop out are similar to the findings of Mohammad & El Masri (2012) on "Factors Affecting drop out of Students in Arab Open University- Bahrain Branch" which concluded that a lot of students leave their program of study incomplete due to non-submission of assignments. The same reason related to assignments factor was also highlighted by Xenos, Pierrakeas and Pintelas (2002), Hellenic Open University, who concluded that the students remained unable to comprehend and understand assignment questions, hence they could not complete it and dropped out of the program. Thus, these studies favor the single reason that is understanding the assignment and its timely submission, failing to do so, students leave their course unfinished.

The results of the study corroborate with the study by Fozdar and Kumar (2006) done at Indira Gandhi National Open University, India, which indicated that the reasons of drop out are failure in timely submission of assignments, workshop attendance and passing in final examinations. On the contrary, Siddiqi (2015) at AIOU, in the study of B.Ed students, found out the failure in any of these causes, assignment submission, workshop attendance and passing final exam, does not lead to drop out of students. It is important to note that the population was B.Ed students who are allowed to attempt their assignments in any mode i.e., English, or Urdu. So, it may not be implemented on the students of M.Phil program who are bound to attempt all the components in English. M.Phil program completion period is fixed whereas B.Ed time limit for degree completion is not fixed. The level of examination of M.Phil is also higher. Therefore, generalizability of B.Ed level findings does not seem justified for M.Phil level.

Another major factor highlighted in the results of the study was thesis that was the pertinent cause of drop out of M.Phil students particularly in the faculties of Sciences and Social Sciences. Mohammad and El Marsi (2012) also confirmed the same in their study as the students feel a lot of problem in the case of thesis supervision and reach time bar situation resulting in drop out. Another study by Xenos, Pierrakeas and Pintelas (2002), Hellenic Open University, also reported similar findings that lack of cooperation on the part of supervisor regarding completion of research work and poor meeting schedules for work progress led to the extent when students face time bar, hence the result is drop out.

Budiman (2018) from Distance University Terbuka, Indonesia reported various factors responsible for drop out of the students, out of these prominent are lack of required English language skills, feelings of isolation, non-achievements of targets and failure to judiciously divide the available time between research work and family or professional responsibilities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To minimize the drop out rate and to increase retention of students of M.Phil program at AIOU, some recommendations are given based on the findings of the study.

Most of the students dropped out due to non-completion of thesis component in all the faculties. Therefore, it is important that the university arranges a practical workshop for the students to select the topic for thesis. Students perceive topic selection for the thesis as a difficult phase, so proper guideline is required at this stage, which may be ensured by continuous supervision and achievement of deadlines to avoid time bar. There is need for time specification for topic selection and synopsis development. The department may work out to select areas of research and provide options to the research students. Faculty members need to facilitate the students by devoting time and creating a conducive environment while synopsis development period. A fair check and balance may be maintained on the part of supervisor and department while selection of topic and finalization of the synopsis. A sample template of the research synopsis may be shared with the students during the workshop so they may work accordingly. Some mentoring activities may be carried out by the senior research students through some interactive session to assist the junior research fellows in finding appropriate direction and overcome their problems during research work. Students need proper guidance for data analysis, so the university may arrange some supportive training in this regard. The use of ICT and hands on practice of SPSS software may be emphasized during the research workshop. Supervisory meetings during the research work may be conducted according to a set criterion which may be shared with all the stakeholders for successful completion of the task within the prescribed timeline. Further the related department may ensure that the set research criteria is being implemented to avoid wastage of resources on the part of the university and valuable time of the supervisor and the research student.

The course workshops for M.Phil may be conducted at the university in the beginning of the first semester so the students may understand the modalities of the assignment and get to know what is expected from them in this activity and how they may answer the assignment questions to gain maximum insight of the course. The medium of instruction for prerequisite degree for admission in M.Phil program may be English as most of the opportunities for further education are in English language at AIOU. The students feel language proficiency as a hurdle in their progress because their preceding degree was in Urdu which they had completed with high grades and on

the basis of that same degree they secured admission in M.Phil program at AIOU. The students who have language challenges the university may make it mandatory for them to complete functional English courses before taking the M.Phil course work. The availability of the students may be considered while arranging face to face workshops in terms of summer and winter breaks in the educational institutions across the country as most of the M.Phil students are professionals, and they may avail these breaks for their own educational progression.

This study may also be carried out in other distance education institutions to investigate their drop out rate at M.Phil level and the means they employ to minimize the phenomenon. A replication study may be conducted at AIOU as the mode of delivery for M.Phil program has changed over the years from face to face to online, this may yield different results.

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