

Exploring the Satisfaction Level of Students of Allama Iqbal Open University Belonging to Remote Areas of Pakistan: An Analytical Study of Azad Jammu Kashmir

Dr. Muhammad Ajmal

Department of Distance, Non-Formal & Continuing Education,
Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Islamabad
Email: drajmal@aiou.edu

Tahira Khalid

Department of Distance, Non-Formal & Continuing Education,
Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Islamabad
Email: dnfetahira@gmail.com

Imtiaz Akhter

Department of Distance, Non-Formal & Continuing Education,
Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Islamabad
Email: imtiazakhter6@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study had the objectives about exploring the perceptions and experiences of undergraduate students for their support services mechanism of Allama Iqbal Open University. The cross-sectional survey was used in this study to assess undergraduate students' perceptions regarding satisfaction level with assistance services from matric to bachelor level students. Data collection was made from the students with the help of questionnaire. The study consisted of undergraduate students of Matric to Bachelor Level Programs Rawalakot (AJK) of the university. The sample consisted of 774 (12%) from the total enrollment of 6450 undergraduates through convenient sampling. The respondents have positive perceptions of all the indicators. The students encountered challenges and dissatisfaction for no response of call and email on time from the university, internet/ network problem, books delivered late and timing of paper was not convenient, infrastructure was poor in exams centers, far examination centers, process of changing of examination center and insufficient channels of communication for academic assistance. There are significant gaps in existing services for students' satisfaction, emphasizing the need for organized and responsive assistance systems that align with the needs of students.

Key words: *Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Student Support Services (SSS), Students Perceptions & Experiences*

INTRODUCTION

Distance education started with online courses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which allowed individuals to take classes at home and submit work by mail. According to Bartley and Golek (2004) online learning, electronic learning or e-learning is called distance education or distance learning which remains part of the education system of the America for long period of time but currently it has taken place as largest sector in the form of distance learning in recent years. Students who were unable to participate in traditional classes for personal, geographical, or

financial reasons received educational opportunities as a result of this strategy. AIOU is one of those educational institutions that provide excellent support for the cause of non-formal education, or distance education, for students (Ayaz et al., 2020). AIOU is one of the biggest Open University in South Asia (Khan et al., 2018). AIOU is rendering great services in the field of distance education. AIOU offers its services to those citizens of the country who are unable to get their regular education in real classroom in the form of formal education. AIOU offers a handful of online programs. Writing assignments, attending tutorials, attending the workshop, and passing a final exam are the four crucial steps to earning a degree (Khan, 2024; Shah & Baloch, 2017). The university has the aim to provide education for all at the door steps of the learners with possible minimum cost.

Online education is now regarded as an essential component of global education systems because it makes education accessible to and adaptable for millions of students worldwide. Through a variety of methods, including traditional distance learning, blended learning, and online learning, AIOU offers a wide range of distance education options, ranging from certificate programs to doctoral studies. Technology is used to provide MPhil and PhD programs. The technology-enabled learning environment is maintained by the Aahgai Learning Portal through the use of various Moodle applications (Afzal et al., 2024). Students need support services because they make studying easier and less stressful. Students gain confidence whenever they have direct access to materials, assistance, and communication. These services also handle any concerns they may have regarding evaluations, studies, or resources. Lacking them, student might have trouble and feel detached. In general support services are vital for keeping students focused and motivated throughout their education. In the era of information technology, the learners can be truly benefitted with the help of latest learning facilities at the learners' own flexible environment, and their choices having a strong connection of the learners, society and the university.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Distance education, often known as distance learning, is a method of providing education in which instructors and students are apart by time and/or physical distance. Online learning, electronic learning or e-learning is called distance education or distance learning which remains part of the education system of the America for long period of time but currently it has taken place as largest sector in the form of distance learning in recent years. Students who were unable to participate in traditional classes for personal, geographical or financial reasons can receive educational opportunities as a result of this strategy (Bartley & Golek, 2004). Distance education has gained popularity in Pakistan with the founding of Allama Iqbal Open University, owing to its flexible learning approach based on Information and Communication Technology (ICT). At present, distance learning meets the demands of a certain target population via a wide range of educational Programs.

Theoretical Background of the Study

Distance Education encourages particular issues as students commonly conduct their learning experiences independently, receiving no frequent personal interaction with tutors and fellow students. In response to these issues, theoretical models have been developed to explain how student assistance services improve academic performance, remove obstacles, and boost student motivation and satisfaction in ODL institutions. Student Integration Model posits that the more tightly integrated and satisfied a student is to the educational and social components that exist within the school; the more likely he/she is to complete her education (Tinto, 2012). This

relationship promotes a sense of belonging, especially crucial for retention of students. In the setting of ODL, when physical connections are restricted establishing online communities along with assistance networks is crucial. A study of student assistance services adopted Tinto's approach, demonstrating that good integration within the academic community improves retention of students (Majaule, 2023). Allama Iqbal Open University may reduce feelings of isolation, dissatisfaction and increase retention by creating online support groups and groups of friends.

According to the Active Learning Theory, it was vital to include activities for the development of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of the material as well as to involve students in the education process (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). This is on the subject of ODL settings: Participatory material, teams working together. According to Dilmac (2021), the 21st century had a profound impact on education, transition from passive to active learning, in which students participate actively classroom activities and hold themselves accountable for achieving their learning goals. The aim of this study was to determine the extent to which Student assistance services can create a socially interactive learning environment that can stimulate the undergraduate AIOU satisfied participants to Active Learning Process, aligns with the Active Learning Theory.

Problems Confronted by Distance Education Learners

It is possible for significant obstacles to have a significant impact on how distance learning students learn and improve academically and satisfied by their performance. Distance learners are barred from forming this contact with peers and instructors as often as regular students; therefore, posing the obstacle for forming supportive academic networks (Schweighart et al., 2024). It is also too hard to handle time and self-discipline as another matter for distance learning students. This is because studying at University of Auckland has no set timetable for classes on campus and students therefore have to determine when and how to sit down to study it together with any employment and family duties. In addition, it is often difficult for the adult student who has big work and responsibility. According to research, among the main factors of dropout rates in online education are poor time management skills (Xavier & Meneses, 2022). The AIOU has also learners who work at different place and with different types of jobs. They also have the ease to access through LMS portals to take the classes and submit their assignments through these portals and save their precious time of travelling and expenses.

There are also perceived constraints, such as the disparity between standard and high-speed internet device accessibility, the availability of digital distractions, and the fear of technological servility that can prevent interaction with others and hinder critical thinking. The policies that students suggested would make it more equitable access, educator training, and piloting innovative tools to improve integration for more satisfied learners (Muzamil & Shah, 2025). The unsatisfied learners take help by unfair means and cheating may become another issue of distance learners. Some of the findings from students revealed that the unsatisfied students from academics cheat due to various factors, such as English not being their native language, lack of access to lecturers, poor network connectivity, and colluding with other students (Taskin & Kokoc, 2025). The dissatisfaction of the students takes them towards academic low performance and sometimes towards failure in particular courses too. The issue of cheating arises more prominently in online assessments, necessitating robust strategies to uphold academic integrity (Oravec, 2022). This all identifies to their dissatisfaction and poor confidence at their own self caused by multiple reasons. There is a need to address the language-related challenges and isolation experienced by distance learners necessitates a comprehensive enhancement of support systems and resources that are available (Taskin & Kokoc, 2025). The confidence of the students becomes low when they are not

satisfied their learning processes. They try to use unfair means in their exams to succeed.

Distance Learners Assistance Services for academic Satisfaction

Online learning opportunities and the utilization of open education resources and other technologies can increase educational productivities by accelerating the rate of learning, reducing costs associated with instructional materials or programs, and better utilizing teacher time (Afzal et al., 2024). Online learning system is used in many countries of the world for the purpose of education. It gives both the teacher and the student the freedom to work at their own pace, giving them the flexibility to create a schedule that fits everyone's schedule (Akyol & Garrison, 2011). Distance learning has been making offer to substantial range of on-line courses with robust online observation systems. These include online classes, multimedia sources and interactive material allowing educators and students to generously utilize digital sources, workshops, assignments and quizzes that harm ordinary constraints of education from being limited by geography (Rizwan et al. 2024). There are three areas which may be focused for enhancement of satisfaction level of the learners, namely: students' self-characteristics, second cognitive level and approach of learner and technology and technical quality. As a result, these aspects must be taken into account when determining how satisfied students are with technology-enabled learning environments (Afzal et al., 2024). As the learners and the educational institutions are not in physically contact, so the academic satisfaction depends upon the services provided by the educational institutes to the distance learners. These services connect them with the institution and their enhancement as an active learner in particular areas of their interests.

Importance of Student Assistance Services in Distance Education

Studying at a distance requires maturity, a high level of motivation, the capacity to multitask, goal-directedness, and the ability to work independently and cooperatively (Brindley, 2014). As a result, most of them have adopted a variety of supportive measures such as regular communication, personalized feedback, and interactive platforms that evoke a sense of community. In the case of technology supporting distance learning, a disturbing factor has shown up that interferes with the normal conduct of online sessions. As this noise stems from technology, it is referred to as 'technological noise' (Rizwan et al. 2024). This increases the dissatisfaction among students. A better online learning system allows for a better balance and work of studies and better satisfaction among the learners (Akyol & Garrison, 2011).

According to Means, et al., (2013) this demands that while utilizing technology enabled learning environments satisfaction of the learners must be ensured by the education providers and stakeholders. In distance learning programs, online assessment and examination of the students should be welcomed so as to increase the quality of performance of academically satisfied students in the examination and assessment (Iqbal & Ahmad, 2010). Students' assistance services are very important in distance education. They provide help and resources to the students to overcome challenges and achieve academic goals effectively. These services help them to enhance in academically, technically and get achievements in their future careers. This is especially true for student assistance services for their satisfaction in online learning because students typically face particular challenges due to the lack of a physical presence and the quick access to university resources. It offers administrative, instructional, examination, counseling, career assistance, and other services. These services are supposed to solve problems with online education at universities like Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), increase participation, and improve learning experiences.

Academic and Tutor Guided Assistance for Distance Learners

Academic assistance and tutoring with writing and other related skills instructions, Asynchronous and synchronous tutoring, individualized supplemental instruction, writing assistance, and course-level study coaching are all components of academic assistance for distance learners. These services, according to empirical studies and reviews, address the learning-content gap that frequently arises when students study remotely with less instructor interaction, targeted tutoring assistance mastery of difficult content, and writing and study skills centers scaffold the meta-cognitive and academic literacies that online students require (Rotar, 2022; Pratt, 2020). For example, third-party online assistance platforms that combine live chat tutoring and writing submission were reported to increase student confidence, improve grades, and be heavily used outside typical hours indicating distance learners benefit from flexible, on demand academic help (Dollinger et al., 2019; Rotar, 2022). Thus, tutor has a pivotal role to assist the remote learners in their academic upbringings. The learners depend on their tutorial guidance to get access the latest contents about their courses of interests. This helps them to build confidence and become an active part of learn processes.

The goal of tutorial services in distance learning is to provide academic support via various online platforms. Virtual tuition, discussion boards, and interactive webinars were among these services. A large randomized controlled trial of a structured online orientation for online students, "Strategies for Online Success," found no overall causal effect on course completion or grades, though timing of enrollment and adherence moderated results, suggesting that orientation design and implementation are very important (Mohzana, 2024). Although it is widely regarded as a "best practice" in the literature, experimental evidence paints a nuanced picture. While systematic reviews include orientation as one of the most common interventions for the intake phase, they caution that their mere availability, optional orientations does not guarantee success (Bastalich & McCulloch, 2024). Online tutoring services have been shown to improve students' academic performance and comprehension of course material. Remote students are better prepared for the social, academic, and technical requirements of online study during orientation and induction.

Technical & library Resource Assistance Technology

LMS navigation, connectivity, software issues and limited access to scholarly resources are consistently identified as major barriers for remote learners in research; addressing these is crucial to equitable access and success (Enwereji & Van Rooyen, 2025). Studies of information seeking behavior among distance learners found common problems: limited time, lack of peers, tutors, librarians, delayed feedback, and challenges in locating relevant resources all of which degrade academic performance if unaddressed (Guo, 2022). The present age is the age of technology. The distance learning is also transferred from traditional learning to learning with the help of latest ICT. The remoteness is no more a hindrance in the process of learning. The technical online learning resources and online libraries are there to be truly benefitted for learning processes.

Administrative advising and proactive outreach For Distance Learners

In higher education, administrative assistance services are essential for maintaining efficient administration and significantly increasing student satisfaction with learning and achievement. These services include things like enrollment administration, academic advising, financial aid, and accessibility services, all of which make the student experience better. Attrition risk is increased by confusion over deadlines, fees, or requirements of undergraduate students

(Courtemanche, 2024). Administrative assistance can cover student's enrollment, financially aid, policy navigation, timetable, and academic inputs and counseling. Clear administrative pathways are more important to distance learning students because of their non-academic responsibilities such as work and family (Grant et al., 2025). Academic advising provides essential information regarding course selection, degree requirements, and career preparation. As counselors assist students in navigating their academic paths and achieving their educational goals, effective advising has been linked to increased enrollment and successful outcomes.

Peer Support and Mentoring Assistance to Distance Learners

In distance education, social connectedness is a strong predictor of retention and well-being. When it is integrated into the course design and aligned to high-risk modules, peer-led group study has also been found to be associated with higher persistence in distance contexts (Zweig et al., 2022). Peer-to-peer supports, such as mentoring, study groups, and virtual communities, are emphasized in reviews and empirical studies as essential for fostering belonging and reducing transactional distance found that mentored students were more persistent and had better study habits and their satisfaction than control students in studies that used peer mentoring or peer-led study groups (Shatila, 2024). In distance learning, there is no physical contact of the peer learning because virtual learning, online learning facilities, students' interaction is only through online platforms. There is always need of the interaction of the learners for the strong communication which is not feasible in the distance learning facilities but they can benefit from the online platforms to interact themselves effectively.

Statement of the Problem

Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has the aim of providing accessibility with affordable education through its open and distance learning mechanism but it is important to evaluate whether the satisfaction level of students with assistance services is sufficiently addressed as per the requirements and problems confronted by students of remote and far flung areas. The students of Allama Iqbal Open University of Rawalakot Region face problems regarding students' assistance services to their satisfactory level which hinders their learning. This study sought to investigate students' perceptions of the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU)'s student satisfaction level with assistance services in AJK. Furthermore to identify the problems faced by the students of Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) regarding the studies through Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU).

The Study's Significance

This study is significant because it provides insight into undergraduate students' perceptions of the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) students' satisfaction level with assistance services provided by the university in AJK. It highlights the issues they face and student satisfaction level of AIOU with students' assistance services; its strengths and weaknesses. The research on admission, tutorial, and exam services yields important insights that can assist universities in enhancing more students' assistance services for gaining their confidence and satisfaction. The study further identifies the areas to be improved which can be helpful to the stakeholders comprising Students, Teachers, Regional director, administrators at the university, Planners and policy makers.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the perceptions of the students regarding satisfaction level of students with

assistance services of Allama Iqbal Open University for remote areas.

2. To assess the perceptions of the students regarding their satisfaction level with assistance services about gender and academic program of Allama Iqbal Open University for remote areas.
3. To examine the perceptions about problems faced by the students regarding assistance services of Allama Iqbal Open University for remote areas.
4. To explore the point of view of the students about improvements regarding their satisfaction level with assistance services of Allama Iqbal Open University for remote areas.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of the students regarding their satisfaction level with assistance services of Allama Iqbal Open University for remote areas?
2. How to assess the perceptions of the students regarding their satisfaction level with assistance services about gender and academic program of Allama Iqbal Open University for remote areas?
3. What are the perceptions of students about problems faced by them regarding assistance services of Allama Iqbal Open University for remote areas?
4. How to explore the point of view of the students about improvements regarding their satisfaction level with assistance services of Allama Iqbal Open University for remote areas?

METHODOLOGY

The methodology was based on quantitative research and cross-sectional survey was used in this study to assess undergraduate students' perceptions of the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) regarding satisfaction level with assistance services from matric to bachelor level. There is only a minor qualitative component in the study and these are three open ended questions. It is primarily quantitative study with a small qualitative component. The aim is to get a broad picture about the problem being explored in the study.

Population

There was total 6450 students enrolled in the Spring-2022 and Autumn 2022 semesters at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in the Rawalakot Region of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) comprised the study's population. These students were studying from matric to bachelor's degrees.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The convenience sampling method was used to select 774 students as the sample for this study from a population of 6450 who were enrolled in undergraduate programs such SSC to Bachelor's level programs. The researcher personally got access to a number of examination centers in Rawalakot, where undergraduate students from various courses came to take their exams. This strategy was chosen due to the participants' accessibility during their scheduled examination sessions.

Table 1

Sampling

Programms	Sample	Male	Female	Total	Sample size
Matric	074	248	526	774	12%
F.A	113				
B.Com	097				
BS	132				
BA	164				
B.Ed	194				
Total	774				

Delimitation

This research study was delimited to the students of undergraduate programs in open and distance learning system for the semesters of Spring-2022 and Autumn-2022 in the district Rawalakot, Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) that include matric General Group (SSC), FA General Group (HSSC), and B.COM, BS, BA General Group, and B.ED (4 years) program.

Research Tool

The researchers created a three-part demographic section of the questionnaire that included three statements about name, gender, and programs. For the quantitative data, the second section contained a total of 32 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (from Strongly Disagree (1), Disagreed (2), Uncertain (3), Agreed (4) and Strongly Agreed (5), and for the qualitative perception. The questionnaires were then analysed using SPSS the quantitative data. The third section contained three open-ended questions. The openended statements' responses were changed into quantitative data to analyze them easily.

Validity and Reliability

For validity of the questionnaire developed on five-point Likert scale, three experts' opinion was sought to check the validity. The observations for the questionnaire were amended on the opinion and recommendations of the experts. The Chronbach's Alpha reliability test was used to determine the instrument's reliability. The result was 0.864, indicating that the research instrument could be used for the study.

Table 2

Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
.864	32

Data Collection

The researchers got access to a number of examination centers scattered throughout Rawalakot, where undergraduate students from matriculation to bachelor's level came to take their exams. This strategy was chosen due to the participants' accessibility during their scheduled examination sessions. The researchers visited the regional campus of AIOU in the Rawalakot region to collect the data. The goal was to get a complete list of all undergraduate students enrolled in all levels of education, from matriculation to bachelor's level. To collect the data, researchers developed a questionnaire which was personally distributed to the students at several regional examination centers in Rawalakot region. This direct approach mitigated the chances of incomplete data and students were allowed for immediate clarification of any questions regarding the survey. For maintaining the integrity of the data researchers personally collected the questionnaires after completion. The purpose and necessary instructions were also explained to students along with obtaining informed consent. The received questionnaires were 774 and these were considered for analysis for the study.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

SPSS software was used for data analysis. Mean, frequency and percentage score was analyzed through the software. The open-ended statements' responses were changed into quantitative data to analyze them easily. The demographic variable comparison (such as gender) was made through independent t-test. The perceptions of the undergraduate students of different programs were compared through ANOVA.

Demographic Analysis

Table 3

Gender wise data

Gender	F	Percentage
Male	248	32%
Female	526	68%
Total	774	100%

Above table shows that male respondents were (32%) and Female respondents were (68%) out of 774 respondents.

Table 4

Programs

Programmes	F	Percentage
Matric	74	9
F.A	113	15
B.Com	97	13
BS	132	17
BA	194	25
B.Ed.	164	21
Total	774	100

This table shows that the distribution of the students in different programs was included in the sample. The highest frequency is of B.A program (25%) and lowest one is the students of Matric program (9%). The frequency distribution shows diversity in representation of students enrolled in various programs.

Table 5

Assistance Services for admission, tutorial and examination

Responses	F	Percentage
Television	65	8
Radio	18	2
News paper	73	10
Social Media	594	77
Billboards	24	3
Total	774	100.0

This table shows that 77% of the students got information through social media and least one through Radio and Bill Boards. This data shows that social media plays very important role to access the students. As majority of the students rely on social media, so AIOU must take steps to enhance the services through its social media platforms along with other sources of access.

Table 6

Analysis of admission through descriptive statistics

S. No	Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Online Admission applying is available	774	4.65	.66

	with the help of online admission system (OAS).			
2	Manual admission form is available along with online admission system facility.	774	4.15	.98
3	SMS confirmation for admission is active.	774	4.05	1.03
4	The complaint registration system is active on line by the request of student.	774	3.99	1.02
5	Regional office provides satisfactory assistance and facilitation about admission.	774	4.05	1.06
6	Satisfactory financial assistance is given to the deserved students.	774	3.79	1.05
7	Scholarship is available for merit meeting students.	774	3.79	1.07
8	You are satisfied with the schedule of o Program or courses offering twice a year.	774	4.38	.93

The above table shows the descriptive statistics for different statements about admission process for the respondents. There were total 774 respondents. Their higher score from one to five indicate higher perceptions about satisfaction level. There are five statements whose response have frequency more than 4, the highest frequency response sis about on line admission system Mean=4.65 (SD=.66), which shows a very positive perception with minimum variability. The financial assistance mean= 3.79 (SD = 1.05) and merit scholarship mean= 3.79 (SD = 1.07) availability shows neutral perception with disagreement revealing standard deviation.

For conclusion, the results show that while various aspects of the admission process, such as the online registration system and the organization of the process show positive results whereas financial assistance and scholarships may benefit gave the less mean scores and high standard deviations, suggesting variability and dissatisfaction. Thus the data reveals positivity in the online system while improvements needed in merit scholarships and accessibility of financial support measures.

Table 7

Analysis of Tutorial services assistance through descriptive statistics

S. No	Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Tutorial classes are managed properly.	774	3.78	1.03
2.	Tutors have competency in their specific subject area.	774	4.19	.98
3.	The students are engaged in discussion by	774	3.99	0.99

	tutors.			
4.	Tutors assist students to assignments completion.	774	3.35	1.21
5.	Assignments marking by tutors on time.	774	4.09	1.03
6.	Complete checking and remarks are given on mistakes of assignments.	774	3.83	1.14
7.	For final paper tutors provide comprehensive guidance to attempt the final paper.	774	3.94	1.09
8.	Tutors alternate classes if some are missed for any reason.	774	2.85	1.06
9.	Tutors can be contacted easily when needed.	774	3.19	1.17

The above table shows the descriptive statistics for different statements about tutorial assistance for the respondents. There were total 774 respondents in the sample. Their higher score from one to five indicate higher perceptions about satisfaction level. Overall Evaluation and Range of Scores: The mean scores for the statements range from a low of 2.85 to a high of 4.19, suggesting varied perceptions regarding the effectiveness and quality of tutorial services. A mean score of 4.19 for the statement "Tutors have competency in their specific subject area." indicates a strong overall confidence in tutors' knowledge. On the other hand, the mean score of 2.85 for "Tutors manage alternate classes if some are missed for any reason". This suggests a significant area of concern among students regarding attendance and class continuity. In conclusion overall, the data suggest that while students feel confident about the competence of their tutors and the conduct of classes, there are notable areas for improvement, particularly in class continuity and assignment support. Institutions may consider focusing on these aspects to enhance the overall effectiveness and satisfaction with tutorial services. Addressing the concerns highlighted in the lower-rated statements could lead to improved educational experiences for students. In summary, the statistical interpretation reveals a general satisfaction with tutorial services, while also identifying several key areas where enhancements could markedly improve the overall educational experience.

Table 8

Analysis of Examination assistance services through descriptive statistics

S.No	Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	SMS are received for the exam Schedule.	774	3.96	1.11
2.	Assistance is given by the exams staff.	774	4.28	.94
3.	It is easy to reach the allotted exam center.	774	3.29	1.30
4.	Papers are held on time.	774	4.38	.93
5.	Examination is fairly conducted without unfair means.	774	4.37	.91

6. The examination center has satisfactory facilities e.g. siting arrangements.	774	3.25	1.27
7. Drinking water and toilets are available in the exam center.	774	3.79	1.15
8. No issue of cleanliness is there in examination center.	774	4.09	1.01
9. Electricity is functional in the exam center.	774	3.43	1.28
10. Reappear Chance is provided if any paper is not passed.	774	4.18	.91
11. Paper marking is satisfactory.	774	3.86	1.12
12. The result announcement is timely by the university.	774	4.25	1.03
13. Results are uploaded on CMS portal.	774	4.46	.75
14. Result is intimated through SMS.	774	3.87	1.06
15. Degree Tracking System is available.	774	4.03	1.01

The above table shows the descriptive statistics for different statements about examination assistance for the respondents. There were total 774 respondents in the sample. Their higher score from one to five indicate higher perceptions about satisfaction level. Overall satisfaction with Exam assistance, the mean scores across the statements suggest a generally positive perception of satisfaction about the examination assistance. The highest mean score is observed for the statement "Results are uploaded on CMS portal" (Mean = 4.46, Std. Deviation = 0.75), indicating that respondents are very satisfied with the availability and accessibility of exam results online. But there are also several statements reflect lower mean satisfaction scores, particularly "It is easy to reach the allotted exam center" (Mean = 3.29, Std. Deviation = 1.30) and "The examination center has satisfactory facilities e.g. siting arrangements." (Mean = 3.25, Std. Deviation = 1.27). Both statements indicate that there is significant room for improvement in accessibility and the physical conditions of examination centers. In conclusion, while the overall perception of examination assistance is favorable, attention should be focused on improving accessibility to examination centers and the adequacy of facilities therein. These changes could enhance student satisfaction notably in the areas identified as concerns.

Table 9

Analysis of difference of Means of different indicators of assistances by the university for students

Indicators	N	Mean		Std. Deviation	Skewness	
		Statistic	Std. Error		Statistic	Std. Error
Admission	774	4.0323	.01652	.42058	-.817	.099

Tutorial Services	774	3.6218	.02117	.55280	-.311	.099
Examinations	774	3.9387	.01836	.41835	-.092	.099

This table presents descriptive statistics for three Indicators related perception of students enrolled in different academic programs regarding assistance provided by the university. These indicators are the variables being measured: Admission, Tutorial assistance and Examinations. The Sample Size was N = 774 for all three indicators. This is a relatively large sample size, which generally leads to more reliable estimates of the population parameters (mean, standard deviation, skewness).

Overall, respondents generally have positive perceptions of all three indicators, as all means are above the midpoint of a typical rating scale (assuming a scale where higher values indicate more positive perceptions). With the least variation, admission receives the highest ratings on average. The fact that tutorial assistance receives the lowest scores and exhibits the most variation suggests that there may be room for improvement in this area. The wider range of opinions represented by a higher standard deviation raise the possibility that some tutorial services are more successful or well-liked than others. The negative skewness for admission and tutorial Services suggests a ceiling effect many respondents are already rating these aspects quite highly, limiting the potential for even higher scores. Examinations are seen to have satisfactory perceptions, with responses are distributed relatively evenly.

Table 10

Over all difference of perceptions of Gender about satisfaction level regarding students' assistance

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Df	Sig
Male	248	2.08	.35			
Female	526	2.06	.37	.273	714	.785

The table presented, above the overall difference of Perception Regarding AIOU Services for students with Respect to Gender, summarizes the results of a statistical analysis comparing perceptions of service quality between males and females. Here's a breakdown of the data and its interpretation: The mean score for males is M=2.08, SD=.35, while the mean score for females is M=2.06, SD= 0.37, slightly lower indicates that, on average, male respondents perceive services just slightly more positively than female respondents. The t-value is 0.273, P=.785, indicated that the statistically not significant difference in means between the two groups as p-value is greater than 0.05. In conclusion, the analysis suggests that there is no significant difference in perceptions of service quality between males and females in the sample population.

Table 11

Over all Difference of perceptions regarding assistance services for students with respect to Program enrolled (ANOVA)

Programs	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	F- value	Sig
Matric	74	4.04	.26	5, 589	2.141	.058
F.A	113	3.98	.36			
B.Com	97	3.94	.35			
BS	132	3.89	.37			
BA	194	3.98	.36			
B. Ed	74	3.87	.45			

The above table shows data from various academic programs along with statistical measures. This table compares how students in various academic programs perceive their experiences. The average perception of students in each program is reflected in the mean score. The B.Ed program has the lowest mean score i.e. 3.87, while the Matric program has the highest mean score, 4.04. All groups have a mean that is higher than the average and a standard deviation that is also low, indicating that students have the same perception of AIOU's services. There is statistically insignificant difference in the perception of AIOU services among students enrolled in different programs, as evidenced by the F-value, which is $F(5,589) = 2.140, P=.058, P>0.05$.

Analyzing the Open-Ended Questions

Table 12

How you perceive about the students' assistance of AIOU in your region?

Responses	%
1. Good	69%
2. Satisfactory	17%
3. Bad/ Not Satisfactory	14%

The above table shows that it is obvious that there is a significant majority of 72%, respondents who have expressed a very positive viewpoint regarding the student's assistance services provided by AIOU. Many students liked the flexibility of university's educational programs, which allows them to complete their education at their doorsteps.

Table 13

What are the problems you face in your program of study at AIOU regarding student assistance services?

Problems	%
1. Network (Internet service issue)	79%

2. Poor facilities of infrastructure and sitting facilities	17%
3. Distance and transport issue from exam center	28%
4. Correspondence issue (call and email)	23%
5. Paper timing	16%
6. The process of changing of exam center is difficult	18

Above table shows that 79% of the students reported that there are internet access problems in particularly in villages and locations with poor power networks, 17% of students have expressed concerns about the poor facilities of infrastructure and sitting facilities at examination centers; 28% have expressed concerns about more distance and transport obstacles impacting their ability to attend exams; 23% have described that they have bad experience with university administrative processes; 16% have expressed concerns about the schedule of their examinations, which are frequently held in the evening; which may create serious difficulties for students to study efficiently. 18% students complained that the procedure of changing examination centers is difficult and frequently results in rejected applications even though acceptable explanations are offered. Simplifying this procedure would provide essential flexibility, enabling students to adjust to personal or logistical changes while also improving their overall satisfaction about examination.

Table 14

Can you give suggestions to improve the student assistance services at the university?

Suggestions	%
1. Ensure that textbooks are ensured to be distributed on time.	30%
2. Exam schedule may be shifted in the morning time	22%
3. Whatsapp group for better information	13%
4. Timely Respond (Email and Calls)	22%
5. Provide study material (textbooks) timely	28%
6. Increase the number of examination centers	12%
7. Clear information availability about scholarship and concessions of fee	21%
8. The internet connectivity issue solid solution	14%

Students, including 30% of them, have suggested that the university should provide textbooks on time so that students can study for exams. 22% of students have suggested that the schedule of their examinations should be in morning time, which are frequently held in the evening. 13% of

students have suggested that the institution set up a WhatsApp group to promote interaction between students and faculty. 22% of students have suggested that the university should improve how they respond to calls and texts. 28% delays in acquiring textbooks disrupt their study plans and impair academic achievement. 12% of students also suggested that additional exam centers be established to make things easier for students. Since each tehsil only has one exam center, it is difficult for many students to find one. 21% Students proposed that the university must provide more comprehensive and accessible information about fee discounts and scholarship opportunities. 14% students said that network access is a considerable challenge in Kashmir where inadequate internet service significantly restricts their capacity to study well and attend online instruction without interruption.

DISCUSSION

The study was conducted to analyze of perceptions and experiences of undergraduate students regarding support services mechanism of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU). The Allama Iqbal Open University is Pakistan's leading open and distance learning university in terms of enrollment and services. The overall findings of this study's data analysis indicate that students at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) have positive perceptions of and positive experiences with student support services. On the other hand, some problems were also identified like late response to student queries from the university, tutors do not help students to complete assignments and do not take alternate class if some classes missed due to any reason and timing of paper is inconvenient. Additionally, a significant number of respondents mentioned issues with the internet and network in far-flung areas, inadequate exam center infrastructure, and a cumbersome procedure for changing exam centers. In comparison with the previous research, these findings help us take the deeper insight into those problems and implications.

Despite the positive perception of assistance services as a whole, many students were dissatisfied with the responsiveness of university representatives when they called. This action is consistent with the findings of Dahmani et al. (2024) that timely communication significantly influences students' satisfaction in open universities. According to Afzal et al. (2024), this study sheds light on the transformative potential of technology in education, particularly in the context of distance learning, and provides educational establishments seeking to improve the quality of remote education with useful insights. To reduce technological noise and improve the quality of online education, it is emphasized that ongoing technology development and targeted interventions are required (Rizwan et al. 2024). In a similar vein, Alshahrani et al. (2024) stated that inadequate student support services in distance learning institutions contributed to even more annoyance. The current study strengthens the evidence of this as it indicates that although the students at AIOU are satisfied with their facilities at the institution, university administration can further enhance this experience by communicating the issues clearly.

Students additionally mentioned difficulty reaching exam centers because of their remote locations. This is consistent with the findings of Zuhairi et al. (2020), which demonstrated that geographical barriers influence online learning participation. The current study validates these findings, since many AIOU students struggle to travel considerable distances to exam centers. The scheduling of the exams also came up, and many students suggested that they should be held in the morning. Having a variety of time slots, on the other hand, may make things easier to access and more flexible for distance learners. The outcomes of this study match Han et al., (2024) argument that institutions should create flexible examination times to meet the different demands of students who work, in online learning. Additionally, a number of respondents expressed

concern regarding inadequate power and seating arrangements at exam centers. The same problems were raised by Wang, (2025), whose work discovered that insufficient facilities in exams centers might contribute to anxiety regarding exams and low student performance. The current study's findings are in line with these issues and emphasize the need for improved examination center facilities. It has been observed from the findings of the study that AIOU is mostly meeting the requirements of the students regarding Admissions, tutorial and examinations support services, students showed their satisfaction on these services. Likewise foreign distance learning institutions, AIOU need upgrading of its existing system, However, matters relating, distance to allotted examination, availability of electricity at examination centers, settings arrangements and infrastructure, taking alternate class if missed and Helpline/Call Centre Services were not up to the mark and students were not satisfied with these services. The authorities at the university should take these areas into consideration for improvement.

CONCLUSIONS

The researcher came to the following conclusion based on the findings: The study focused on three main areas: admission, tutorial, and exam assistance services. It focused at undergraduate students' perceptions about their satisfaction level with the AIOU's assistance services. The study's findings showed that the students' perceptions with the assistance services offered by Allama Iqbal Open University were not significantly different. In general, respondents view all three indicators admission, instruction, and examination positively. Admission received the highest ratings, on average, with the least variability. The fact that Tutorial Services received the lowest scores and has the most variation suggests that it may require improvement. Moreover findings of the research highlighted that there was no significant difference in perceptions for satisfaction about service quality between males and females in the sample population as well as in the perception of students enrolled in different program regarding AIOU services.

However, numerous students complained that the university did not respond to their calls or emails on time, that their books were delivered late, and that the timing of their papers was inconvenient. And a large number of respondents described internet/ network problem, infrastructure was poor in exams centers, far examination centers and process of changing of examination center was complicated. Moreover, for improvement in the assistance services, the majority of respondents suggested that textbooks be distributed on time, that students respond promptly to emails and phone calls, that exams be held in the morning, that more test centers be established, that class Whatsapp groups be established, that an internet connectivity issue be resolved, and that clear information about scholarship be provided.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made in light of the results:

1. AIOU may establish 24 hours working helpline for students to get immediate answers to their queries which includes automated email responses.
2. The university may introduce may give an access to e-books and updated learning material and recorded lectures via a mobile app and student portal to address problems with internet access, and missed classes. Teachers can upload recorded classes so that students can access them at any time. Moreover, Regional centers should also have Wi-Fi hotspots where students can visit and download lectures.
3. An online examination system may be introduced by Allama Iqbal Open University. In

addition, the procedure for changing a center may be made available online, making it simple for students to request changes through AIOU's student portal. The exam's accessibility and ease of use will be enhanced by these methods.

Future Direction

The current research study was conducted in only one region, the same kind of study may be conducted in provinces of the country.

REFERENCES

Afzal, M. T., Ashfaq, M. S., & Mushtaq, M. S. (2024). Revolutionizing Distance Learning through Technology: A Case Study of Allama Iqbal Open University. *Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language (PJSEL)*, 10(2), 139-157.

Akyol, Z., & Garrison, D. R. (2011). Understanding cognitive presence in an online and blended community of inquiry: Assessing outcomes and processes for deep approaches to learning. *British journal of educational technology*, 42(2), 233-250.

Alshahrani, A. M., Al-Shahrani, M. S., Miskeen, E., Alharthi, M. H., Alamri, M. M. S., Alqahtani, M. A., & Ibrahim, M. E. (2024, March). Prevalence of depressive symptoms and its correlates among male medical students at the University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia. In *Healthcare* (Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 640). MDPI.

Ayaz, M., Khan, R. U. A., & Khan, S. (2020). Analysis of Online Workshop as a Medium of Instruction and Communication: A Case Study of Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad. *Global Social Sciences Review*, 5(2), 401-408.

Bartley, S. J., & Golek, J. H. (2004). Evaluating the cost effectiveness of online and face-to-face instruction. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 7(4), 167-175.

Bastalich, W., & McCulloch, A. (2024). The ideal research degree supervisor 'can play any role': Rethinking institutional orientation and induction for commencing doctoral students. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 61(3), 583-596.

Bonwell, C. C., & Eison, J. A. (1991). *Active learning: Creating excitement in the classroom. 1991 ASHE-ERIC higher education reports*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, The George Washington University, One Dupont Circle, Suite 630, Washington, DC 20036-1183.

Brindley, J. E. (2014). Learner support in online distance education: Essential and evolving. *Online distance education. Towards a research agenda*, 287-310.

Courtemanche, D. (2024). *Persisting Past the First Year: A General Inductive Analysis Around the Attrition of a Diverse Population of Adult-learners Enrolled in an Online Undergraduate Program* (Doctoral dissertation, Northeastern University).

Dahmani, N., Ali, W., Aboelenein, M., Alsmairat, M. A., & Faizi, M. (2024). From classroom interaction to academic success: tracing the mediating role of effective communication in faculty-student dynamics. *Cogent Education*, 11(1), 2377847.

Dilmac, S. (2021). The Influence of Active Learning Provided by Distance Education on Academic Achievement, Self-Efficacy and Attitudes in Art Education. *Educational Policy Analysis and Strategic Research*, 16(1), 194-209.

Dollinger, M., & Lodge, J. (2019). What learning analytics can learn from students as partners. *Educational Media International*, 56(3), 218-232.

Enwereji, P. C., & Van Rooyen, A. (2025). Exploring the barriers to online student learning support services: A review. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 39(1), 69-93.

Grant, C., Benchimol, J. C., Judd, J. C., Rich, W. Z., Beretta, A. C., Williams, E. M., ... & DeVasto, D. (2025). *Parenting While PhDing: Surviving and Improving the Working Conditions of Graduate Student Parents*. Rutgers University Press.

Guo, H. (2022). Library Support For Black Male Community College Students In Distance Education.

Han, S., Zhang, Z., Liu, H., Kong, W., Xue, Z., Cao, T., & Shu, J. (2024). From engagement to performance: the role of effort regulation in higher education online learning. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 32(10), 6607-6627. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 25(1), 87-102.

Iqbal, M. J., & Ahmad, M. (2010). Enhancing quality of education through e-learning: the case study of Allama Iqbal Open University. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 11(1), 84-97.

Khan, I., Khan, F. N., & Ali, A. (2018). Issues in Teacher Education through Distance Education: A Case Study of Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad, Pakistan. *Global Social Sciences Review*, 3(4), 142-155.

Khan, S. H. (2024). *Student satisfaction with the university shared service operating model in Australia* (Doctoral dissertation, Victoria University).

Majaule, F. A. (2023). Assessing student support services in open and distance learning: The case of Botswana Open University. *Teacher Education through Flexible Learning in Africa (TETFLE)*, 4.

Means, B., Toyama, Y., Murphy, R., & Baki, M. (2013). The effectiveness of online and blended learning: A meta-analysis of the empirical literature. *Teachers college record*, 115(3), 1-47.

Mohzana, M. (2024). The impact of the new student orientation program on the adaptation process and academic performance. *International Journal of Educational Narratives*, 2(2), 169-178.

Muzamil, M., & Shah, G. (2025). Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Technology for Sustainable Education: A Qualitative Study in Pakistan. *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, 19(2).

Oravec, J. A. (2022). AI, Biometric Analysis, and Emerging Cheating Detection Systems: The Engineering of Academic Integrity?. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 30(175), n175.

Pratt, K. (2020). Supporting distance learners: Making practice more effective. *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning*, 24(1), 144-158.

Rizwan, S., Ashfaq, S., & Karakus, M. (2024). Technological Barriers in Online Education: Comparing Student Experiences at Allama Iqbal Open University and Anadolu University. *International Journal of Distance Education and E-Learning*, 10(1), 55-68.

Rotar, O. (2022). A missing theoretical element of online higher education student attrition, retention, and progress: A systematic literature review. *SN Social Sciences*, 2(12), 278.

Schweighart, R., Hast, M., Pampel, A. M., Rebien, J. A., & Trautwein, C. (2024). Transition into distance education: A scoping review. *Education Sciences*, 14(10), 1130.

Shah, B. H., & Baloch, G. S. (2017). ICT Usage among Allama Iqbal Open University Students (Exploring Reliance and Relevance of ICT). *Global Media Journal: Pakistan Edition*, 10(1).

Shatila, S. L. (2024). Not alone when I'm feeling stressed: Online adult learner connection and retention. *Adult education quarterly*, 74(1), 43-61.

Taskin, N., & Kokoc, M. (2025). Behavioural engagement, academic dishonesty, and performance gaps: Comparing online and paper-pencil based tests in an online learning context. *Education and Information Technologies*, 1-25.

Tinto, V. (2012). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago press.

Wang, J. (2025). Factors Impacting Freshmen's Satisfaction and Learning Outcome in Shandong, China. *AU-GSB e-JOURNAL*, 18(2), 34-42.

Xavier, M., Meneses, J., & Fiuzza, P. J. (2022). Dropout, stopout, and time challenges in open online higher education: A qualitative study of the first-year student experience. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, 1-17.

Zuhairi, A., Karthikeyan, N., & Priyadarshana, S. T. (2020). Supporting students to succeed in open and distance learning in the Open University of Sri Lanka and Universitas Terbuka Indonesia. *Asian Association of Open Universities Journal*, 15(1), 13-35.

Zuhairi, A., Raymundo, M. R. D. R., & Mir, K. (2020). Implementing quality assurance system for open and distance learning in three Asian open universities: Philippines, Indonesia and Pakistan. *Asian Association of Open Universities Journal*, 15(3), 297-320.

Zweig, J., Hanita, M., Stafford, E., & Khanani, N. (2022). Impact of an orientation on online students' course outcomes. *Journal of research on Technology in education*, 54(5), 655-678.