
Distance education in library and information science: experience in Pakistan

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Abstract

Describes the library and information science education through the distance teaching system offered by Allama Iqbal Open University in Pakistan. The only open university in the country has offered Certificate and Bachelor's programmes in the subject since 1988 and is planning to offer Master's and some other advanced programmes in the future. The paper presents a brief history of the University and the establishment of the Department of Library and Information Sciences. Syllabi and objectives of various LIS courses are provided. The system of education, including admissions, study materials, regional services, tutors, study centres, assignments and examination is also described. Enrolment data up to spring 1996 are analyzed (by area and gender). Opinions of senior library professionals in the country about these LIS courses are also cited.

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In Pakistan, there are 6,034 libraries, while library schools at the six universities in the country have only produced so far about 4,100 professionally qualified librarians who obtained at least a first degree, namely a Postgraduate Diploma. Of these Pakistani qualified librarians a large number have left the country. According to an estimate by Adil Usmani (1986), 113 Pakistanis are employed overseas. Various surveys have revealed that most of the libraries in Pakistan are understaffed or possess unqualified staff, and are performing only custodial duties. However, to meet the requirement for junior and middle level professional positions, some professional associations in big cities like Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Bahawalpur are offering under-graduate Certificate courses, but these do not fulfill the manpower needs of Pakistani libraries. There has always been a demand for library education from in-service personnel in libraries who do not hold library qualifications, as well as by inhabitants who live in far-off cities and towns where library education facilities are not available. These are the circumstances in which the Allama Iqbal Open University established the Department of Library and Information Sciences and started offering library education through the distance learning system.

Allama Iqbal Open University

During the 1960s the importance of distance education was felt in Pakistan and in the beginning programmes on education and general awareness were provided on television and radio to the people of Pakistan, especially to the rural population. These efforts could not meet the national needs. Pakistan was already facing the problem that there were no financial resources to educate the people through formal educational methods. This dearth compelled the country's educational planners to explore the possibilities of unconventional methods of education. The idea of an open university was floated in the late 1960s and it materialized with the broad

The author is thankful to the following officers of Allama Iqbal Open University for helping him in collecting data for this paper: Miss Masooda Chaudhry, Incharge, Research & Evaluation Centre; Mr Niaz Hussain, Chairman, Department of Library and Information Sciences; and Mr Asjad H. Bukhari, Librarian at University Library.

principles laid down in the Education Policy of 1972-80.

Open universities are being used in several countries to provide education and training to people who cannot leave their homes and jobs for full-time studies. A People's Open University was therefore established to provide part-time educational facilities through correspondence courses, tutorials, seminars, workshops, laboratories, television and radio broadcasts and other mass communication media; the University was to provide facilities in fields and subjects of immediate improvement such as the training of elementary teachers and members of the National Literacy Corps and the promotion of rural improvement and community development activities.

The National Assembly of Pakistan adopted a resolution to approve the People's Open University Act No. XXXIX in May 1974. The University commenced functioning in June 1974. In 1977, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the great poet and philosopher Dr Sir Muhammad Iqbal, the University was renamed as Allama Iqbal Open University. The main objectives of the University laid down under the act are as follows:

- to provide facilities to people who cannot leave their homes and jobs in such a manner as it may determine;
- to provide such facilities to the masses for their educational uplift as it may determine;
- to provide facilities for the training of teachers in such a way as it may determine;
- to provide for instruction in such branches of learning technology or vocations as it may deem fit, and to make provision for research and for the advancement and dissemination of knowledge in such a manner as it may determine; and
- to hold examinations and to award and confirm degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic distinctions to the persons who have been admitted to and have passed examinations under the prescribed condition.

The President of Pakistan is the Chancellor of the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) while the Federal Minister of Education is

Pro-Vice Chancellor. AIOU consists of three academic faculties:

- (1) basic and applied sciences;
- (2) social sciences and humanities; and
- (3) education.

The faculties are further divided into 22 teaching departments. These departments offer programmes of distance learning from matriculation to M.Phil. levels.

Establishing the LIS Department

AIOU emerged on the map of the educational world in 1974. From its start, literacy, technical, scientific and professional education were aimed to be provided to rural people. That is why the young and enthusiastic assistant librarian (then) Mr Mahmudul Hasan made efforts to draw the attention of University authorities towards the importance of library science and library education on various occasions, at meetings and informal gatherings. But it was not possible for a newly born organization to provide resources for this task forthwith. The result was that neither any course on library science was offered nor could a regular library science department be established. However, four years after the establishment of AIOU in July 1978, a course was offered to school teachers named as "Primary Teachers' Orientation Course (PTOC)". In that course a unit entitled "School Library Management" was included. This unit was the starting point of library science education by AIOU. Though this unit did not remain part of the syllabus for a long time, it led to new directions of thought and stimulated the desire for opening a new library science department. In the words of Hamid Rehman:

Though the course was turned down but it opened the new horizons of hope which was urged by the said deputy librarian, and other people of various walks.

The documents of the department are evidence that during the years 1978-1984 continuous spadework remained in progress. During this period the syllabi of various national and international universities were acquired. They were scanned thoroughly. The library world in the country was explored and lists of eminent personalities in this world were prepared (in order to seek their assistance on the occasion of course development)

and preliminary work on course layout was completed.

Since 1979, the national press and people have been urging the start of a library science course at AIOU. Meanwhile various efforts have been made to start a library science course but due to the lack of adequate resources all came to failure. At last, due to increasing public pressure and the personal interest of the new Vice Chancellor, Dr G.A. Allana, this movement came to the brink of success and an independent Department of Library and Information Sciences was established in March 1985 with the following objectives:

- to create a teaching/learning environment through distance teaching system which will foster and facilitate the attainment of skills, attitudes and knowledge necessary for students to obtain optimal success in the library/information profession;
- to assume a dynamic role in providing leadership to the library/information profession and to related professional institutions/organizations; and
- to promote an increasingly productive faculty/student commitment to research and publication.

LIS courses

At present the department offers the following programmes.

Certificate in Librarianship

This course was approved, developed and launched keeping in view the great need for trained personnel in libraries to perform different para-professional tasks. The course has been introduced at the post-intermediate level. The department authorities claim that the course contents are slanted to principles and practices of the trade rather than sheer theoretical exposition. The topics are related to skill development and a “how to do work” approach. The Certificate in Librarianship programme consists of the following two courses. These courses are divided into 18 units each (one full credit).

- *Organizing library resources* (Course code 422): the objectives of this course are to enable the students to: comprehend and apply effectively the basic concepts and skills of acquiring, organizing, maintaining and utilizing the library materials, and

acquire an understanding of the changing social, cultural and educational role of the library in contemporary Pakistani society. The course contents include user needs in academic, government, special and public libraries; book selection; acquisition procedure; serials organization and their acquisition; non-book media; accounting and book-keeping; and cataloguing and classification (theory and practical).

- *Library services* (Course code 423): the objectives of this course are: to develop an understanding of the importance of communication processes in the effective performance of para-professional roles and provide students with an intellectual and educational atmosphere which stimulates a positive commitment to libraries and continued professional development. The course contents include library housekeeping; lending/circulation procedures; reference inquiries and materials; bibliographic aids and services; reader services; inter-library loans; reprography and libraries; office practice; library supplies; library equipment and furniture; library premises and building; library stock verification; library statistics; library binding practice; care and treatment of documents; press-cutting files; picture collection files; and practical work with reference materials.

Bachelor in Library and Information Sciences (BLIS)

Following the re-structuring of the University's intermediate and BA programmes on a “cluster” basis, it was fully realized that potential for a full series of courses in the field of library science existed. Therefore, in 1990, two new courses were introduced. These two courses plus two Certificate courses make four full credits towards a BLIS degree. The purpose of the new courses is to introduce the students to resources and services that the library offers and enable them to use those resources effectively, thereby providing easy and unrestricted access to the information they may be needing in their studies and even in their day-to-day normal work. The courses have been designed to prepare students for seeking and using information as a normal part of daily life. The courses will enable the students to manage or organize libraries. The courses are also intended for training of para-professional library staff and others interested

in picking up librarianship as a career. Course contents are given below.

(1) *History of libraries with reference to Pakistan* (Course code 466):

- early writing materials;
- libraries of the ancient world;
- libraries in the Islamic era;
- libraries in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent (Muslim period);
- national education policies and libraries;
- history of printing in Pakistan;
- university libraries;
- college libraries;
- school libraries;
- public libraries;
- libraries of government and semi-government institutions;
- special libraries;
- religious libraries;
- private collections;
- National Library of Pakistan and Directorate of Libraries;
- Pakistan Library Association and other professional associations; and
- library development.

(2) *Classification and cataloguing* (Course code 467):

- theory of classification;
- classification systems;
- Dewey Decimal Classification;
- Library of Congress Classification;
- Universal Decimal Classification;
- problems of library classification in Pakistan;
- expansions in classification systems;
- process of classification;
- subject headings;
- cataloguing department;
- cataloguing codes;
- cataloguing of books and non-book materials;
- cataloguing of serials;
- entry heading;
- preparation of catalogue cards;
- filing of catalogue cards; and
- computerized cataloguing.

The Department of Library and Information Sciences at AIOU also plans some other courses to be started in future. These are some of them.

More courses at BLIS level

The department is struggling to strengthen the BLIS programme by providing more

courses. Niaz Hussain provided a list of such courses. Among these the outlines of “Using books and libraries” and “Serial librarianship” have been approved by the authorities:

- using books and libraries;
- serial librarianship;
- library computer literacy;
- library technical skills;
- literature searching: compiling bibliographies/lists;
- conservation of library materials;
- building of library collections;
- school libraries;
- college libraries;
- university libraries;
- public libraries;
- children’s libraries;
- special libraries/documentation centres;
- business and professional libraries;
- agricultural libraries;
- medical libraries; and
- law libraries.

MSc in Library and Information Sciences

Through offering a Master’s programme the Department of Library and Information Sciences intends to contribute to the advancement of librarianship, library and information sciences for strengthening and improving the library/information services of the nation. The programme will produce high level professionals in LIS to provide organizational and managerial/administrative leadership to the different types of libraries in the country. The programme also aims to provide opportunities for in-service technical/professional education and training to persons already serving at middle-level positions (Diploma/Bachelor in Library Science level). As a result, library services in Pakistan would be improved and brought up to the standard of library services available elsewhere in the world. The programme stands approved by the University statutory bodies, but unfortunately, it could not take off due to a lack of resources.

The Master’s programme will include the following compulsory and elective courses.

- subject analysis: structure, methods, and techniques;
- cataloguing: theoretical, applied and comparative;
- reference and information services;
- library organization and management: principles and techniques;

- library systems analysis: methods and techniques;
- information storage and retrieval;
- library automation: methods and techniques;
- research methods in librarianship;
- academic libraries: organization and management;
- special libraries: organization and management;
- public libraries: organization and management;
- communication, mass media and libraries;
- media librarianship;
- collection development: methods and techniques;
- archives management: methods and techniques; and
- research thesis.

Post-Master Studies in Library and Information Sciences

Since its establishment the Department of Library and Information Sciences has planned to provide acquaintance to working librarians having an MLIS Degree with recent advances in the field. In the words of Mahmudul Hasan:

The variety of course concentration programmes will be identified for practicing professionals who possess a Master's Degree in library science from Allama Iqbal Open University or any other University and will aim at acquainting the working librarians with national and international professional developments in the field of Library/Information Science. The completion of a course under this programme will entitle a student to receive a Certificate of Advanced Study in Librarianship.

The course contents will be organized on post-experience level.

Educational strategies

Admissions

Twice a year admissions are announced through national newspapers of Pakistan on 1st May (for the autumn semester) and 1st November (for the spring semester). The students have to contact the University authorities and gain admission. A student has to take two full credit or four half credit courses in one semester (six months). Candidates with an Intermediate Certificate are eligible to seek admission. Passing Courses

422 and 423 is a prerequisite to get admission in Courses 466 and 467.

Study materials

The written materials (LIS textbooks) in each course consist of unit lessons; each has a self-explanatory composition in which the theme has been developed in simple and informal language and in a self-learning style. Lessons have been set in a format that makes them distinct from the commonly used textbooks in formal education. Two books, written in Urdu, having nine units each are provided for each full credit course. The units have been written by various LIS teachers and working librarians throughout the country. A full credit course has an actual study period of 18 weeks. A correspondence unit for each week requires about ten hours of study. Students are expected to work regularly throughout the semester.

Regional services

AIOU has a well-arranged network of regional offices, sub-regional offices, coordinating offices and study centres located at accessible points of cities/towns. The regional offices act as liaison offices with local authorities and departments, agencies and other institutions. The University is projected through them into the distinct corners of the country. They are the very necessary intermediaries between the course coordinators and the thousands of students spread over all parts of the country. They advise the students, provide them with relevant literature, application forms and other introductory materials. They appoint tutors and organize and supervise the examinations.

Tutors

The tutors for LIS courses are appointed on a part-time basis from local institutions by the Regional Directors on the following criteria:

- MA/MLS with three years professional experience or MA/MSc/MLS and working as a college or university teacher or MA/MSc in any subject along with a Diploma in Library and Information Science and working as a librarian in any library.
- Regular/life member of the Pakistan Library Association.

Tutor and student contact is provided throughout the semester. Normally 30–35

students are allotted to a tutor. The tutors are required to check assignments and return them to the students with instructional notes. The tutors are also required to hold tutorial meetings, practicals and to provide guidance to the students.

Study centres

Study centres are arranged at key places where students meet their tutors and fellow students to discuss their study problems and to have tutorial guidance. The study centres are open in the afternoon and on specified days and times. Normally meetings on a fortnightly basis are arranged. A complete schedule of meetings is provided to the students in advance.

Assignments

Each LIS full credit course has four assignments based on the reading material provided to the students. The students are required to complete and send them to their respective tutors for assessment. Both objective type and subjective type questions are included in the assignments. These assignments fulfill the following objectives:

- to enable a student to have his/her performance and progress assessed regularly by an expert in LIS courses;
- to enable a tutor to give instructions to his/her students through comments and corrections made on the assignments; and
- to act as a pacing device for the student to pass in the assignment component during his/her period of study.

Each assignment carries 100 marks. To pass in the assignment component a student has to obtain at least a 40 per cent mark.

Examinations

For each course a final examination is held at the end of the semester. To pass in the examination a candidate has to obtain a minimum mark of 33 per cent. To pass the course as a whole successful completion of both of the components (assignments and final examination) is compulsory. To prepare the final result 75 per cent weighting is given to marks obtained in the final examination, and 25 per cent to marks obtained in assignments. A student who secures a 40 per cent aggregate mark is declared successful.

Enrollment

The very first LIS education programme by AIOU was started in 1988 when courses 422 and 423 were offered in the spring semester. After two years, in spring 1990, the Department of Library and Information Sciences was able to offer courses 466 and 467. Basharat Hafeez provided course-related information on enrollment, drop-out, appearances in examination and passed candidates up to the semester of spring 1991. The total enrollment was 5,927, of which 2,209 candidates (37 per cent) dropped out. A total of 3,718 candidates (63 per cent) appeared in the final examination out of which 3,064 (82 per cent) passed the courses. Course wise details are given in Table I.

To collect the latest data about LIS courses the author personally visited AIOU headquarters at Islamabad. From the course registers kept with the Research & Evaluation Centre of the University only regional and gender enrolment data up to spring 1996 could be found. The students enrolled in LIS courses spread over four provinces of Pakistan: Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and the North West Frontier Province; the State of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK); the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Capital Area (Islamabad). Table II shows the area detail of enrollment in various courses.

Table I Student enrollments, appeared, passed, dropped-out (spring 1988–spring 1991)

Course code	Enrollment	Appeared (%)	Passed (%)	Dropped-out (%)
422	2,741	1,623 (59)	1,204 (74)	1,118 (41)
423	2,407	1,535 (64)	1,401 (91)	872 (36)
466	395	284 (72)	253 (89)	111 (28)
467	384	276 (72)	206 (75)	108 (28)
Total	5,927	3,718 (63)	3,064 (82)	2,209 (37)

Source: Calculated from the data provided by Hafeez (1994, pp. 152-3)

Table II Area wise enrollment in various LIS courses (spring 1988 to spring 1996)

Area	Course code				Total
	422	423	466	467	
Punjab	3,409	3,386	709	690	8,194
FATA & Capital	974	986	322	315	2,597
NWFP	732	687	189	174	1,782
Sindh	770	743	131	135	1,779
AJK	265	255	48	49	617
Balochistan	54	51	9	8	122
Total	6,204	6,108	1,408	1,371	15,091

Being the most populated province Punjab has the maximum number of students in all courses. Most of the students were enrolled in Course 422 because this is the very basic LIS course. Total number of students enrolled in all courses is 15,091 (see Figure 1).

Figure 2 shows that maximum enrollment is in the regions of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. These twin cities actually are the centre of the AIOU. Students can contact and get guidance directly from the faculty of the department. Other urban regions also show a good enrollment in the subject. The reasons are the large number of libraries in the cities, good literacy rate and awareness of the subject of library and information science. Table III shows the male and female ratio of the enrollment in various LIS courses. The overall rate of female enrollment is 27 per cent.

Figure 3 shows enrollment data of LIS courses for all semesters from spring 1988 to spring 1996. Courses 422 and 467 were not offered in spring 1992. The graph shows that in the beginning there is a comparatively good enrolment in all courses. During 1992 and 1993 there is a decline in the enrolment but in the later years there is again a rise.

Criticism of the programme

Since the very first day of its inception the LIS programme through distance teaching has

been a victim of severe opposition by senior professionals in the country. In the words of Dr Mumtaz A. Anwar:

Two very dangerous developments are gaining ground in our profession in Pakistan. These are the distance teaching programmes of AIOU and PLA's push for introducing library science at the Bachelor and Intermediate level. Undergraduate professional education, distant or class-room based, is a very short-sighted approach. It will damage the professional status more than anything else.

Dr Anis Khurshid condemns the proposed Master's Degree programme of AIOU by calling it:

... an ill-advised attempt which has no precedence anywhere in the professional world. The programme does not have any residency or practice work requirements. This programme is being implemented while ignoring the needs of training of village librarians.

He presented a detailed list of flaws in the books written for the Bachelor's programme and in the conclusion he said that the "reading materials have been produced without much care for their content and quality". In opposition to the Master's programme he cited Sajjad ur Rehman who says, "Such a programme would have a devastating impact on the quality of library education in the country."

The PULSAA Conference on Library Education in Pakistan (November 3-5, 1990) passed a resolution against this programme

Figure 1 Area wise distribution of enrollment in various LIS courses

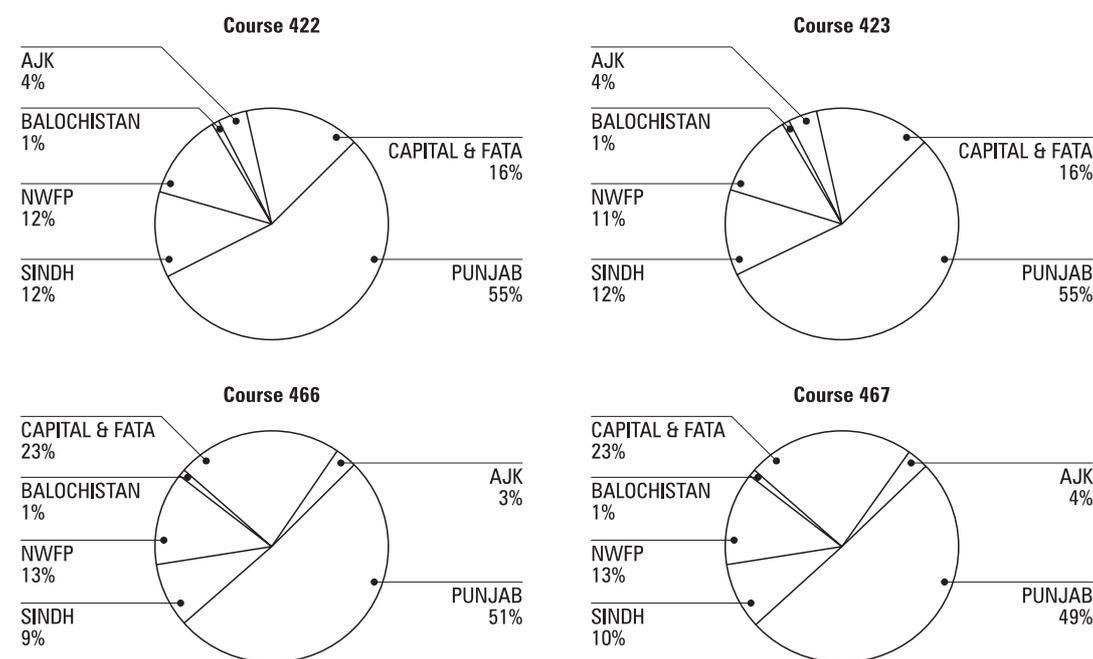
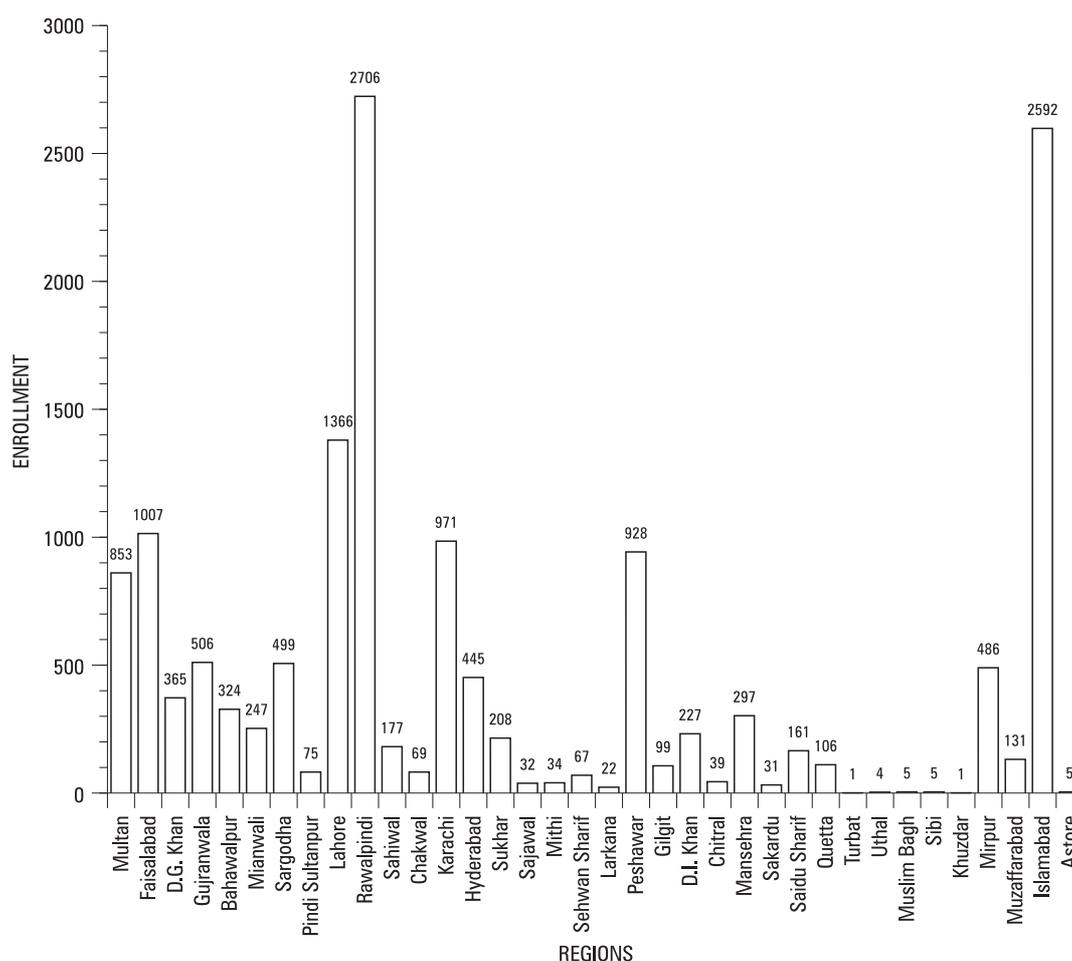


Figure 2 Region wise distribution of total enrollment in four LIS courses**Table III** Gender-wise enrollment in various LIS courses (spring 1988 to spring 1996)

Gender/ courses	Course code				Total	%
	422	423	466	467		
Male	4,503	4,394	1,063	1,045	11,005	73
Female	1,701	1,714	345	326	4,086	27
Total	6,204	6,108	1,408	1,371	15,091	

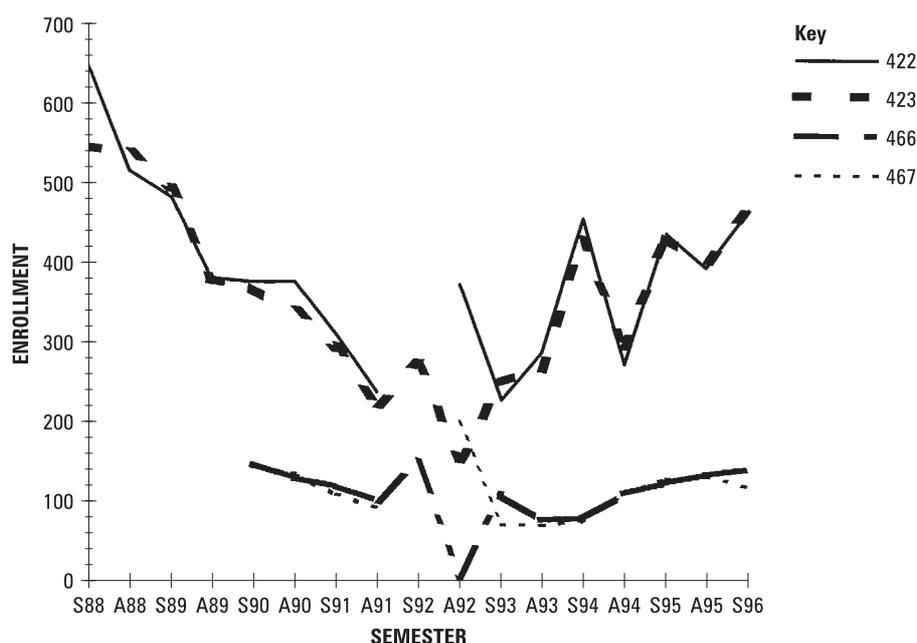
which was cited by Siddiqui and Mujahid (1991):

Another significant resolution of the Conference demanded that Allama Iqbal Open University must cancel the degree programmes in Library and Information Science as it lacked in all the prerequisites of professional education. The Conference viewed that the degree programme announced by AIOU was a clear-cut violation of the fundamental principles which required residency requirement, intensive teacher-taught contact, access of students to libraries and laboratories, and a set-up to inculcate professional norms and ethics among the budding professionals. The Conference added that nowhere in the world such a distant education programme had been offered. The Conference demanded that the University Grants

Commission and the Government of Pakistan should intervene in the matter to safeguard the interests of the library and information profession, which are being threatened by an unprecedented influx of thousands of degree and certificate holders in librarianship who would not satisfy the minimum professional requirements.

Syed Ghayyur Hussain (1994) states that the LIS courses taught at AIOU are only of a theoretical nature and in the result after passing the examination the students have no practical knowledge of librarianship. Hamid Rehman criticized the appointments of tutors and other matters by saying that:

Recommendations for such appointments are generally come from regional directors who very often recommend the preferred ones. Though the talented expertise with distinctive academic record is there, but just to oblige a few approachable, incompetent professionals, generally with less qualifications are recommended who find the job of evaluation of assignments, etc ... Regarding the tutor guidance and practical performance it is again a pity that except the first couple of certificate courses, no fortnightly lectures or meeting of teachers and students were organized ... AIOU by enrolling the

Figure 3 Semester wise enrollment in various LIS courses

thousands and thousands of students without knowing the market demand has spoiled the professional ethics and norms by causing unemployment and saturation.

Rehman also quoted Mehboob's comments about LIS courses at AIOU as "rampant enrollment is still another divesting factor that will produce quacks" and "decision [to start the programme] was based on very hasty conclusions". Akhtar Hanif is also of the opinion that "the programme is not objective and seems to be framed in a hurry. It conflicts with the programmes already offered in the Universities of the country both in nomenclature as well as in course contents".

Together with this bitter criticism this programme was also appreciated by various professional quarters. The textbooks written for the courses of library and information sciences in Urdu were recognized as a milestone in the history of library education in Pakistan. In a survey conducted by Basharat Hafeez most of the students are of the opinion that the overall standard of the courses is satisfactory and 82 per cent of them strongly recommend to launch the Master's Degree Programme.

Although there are so many flaws and deficiencies in the courses yet these courses have played a significant role in imparting professional education in para-professional staff of the libraries in the country. The existing courses should be revised and updated. Designing carefully and fulfilling the

prerequisites, new courses should be started. The more serious problems of the LIS Department may be overcome by providing financial resources. In this respect donor agencies of advanced countries may be helpful.

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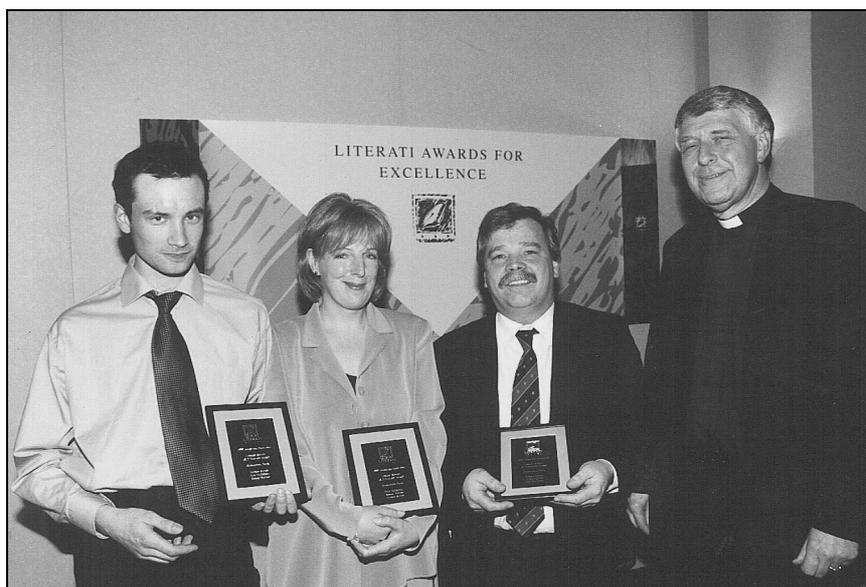
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