

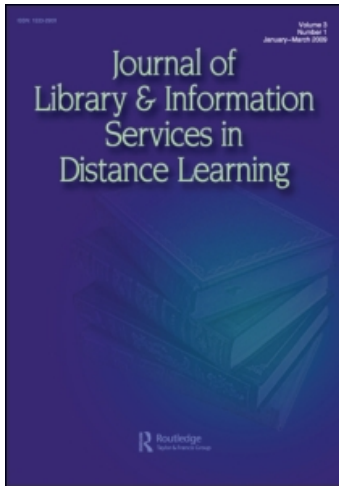
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Libraries' Services at Distance: A Survey of Allama Iqbal Open University Tutors in Pakistan

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Libraries' Services at Distance: A Survey of Allama Iqbal Open University Tutors in Pakistan

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A survey was conducted to determine the satisfaction level of distance education tutors with the location and physical setup, collection, resources and services being offered at thirty-four regional campuses and centers' libraries network of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in Pakistan including Azad Jammu and Kashmir territory. A semi structured questionnaire was sent by post to one hundred randomly selected distance education tutors in the country of eleven post graduate programs during spring semester 2007. The response rate was 86%. The majority of the respondents were satisfied with the location and physical setup of the libraries. They were dissatisfied with the collection and services of the libraries. The respondents suggested proper library building and resources should be provided to the libraries. Most of the respondents suggested that the University should arrange information literacy programs for the tutors. A majority of the respondents fulfilled their information needs by using libraries other than AIOU. The statistical analysis shows that there was a significant difference between the opinion of female and male.

KEYWORDS *Library services, Allama Iqbal Open University, tutors, distance education, Pakistan*

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Distance education has created a new population of library users as compared to the past when this population was small in number and remote in location. "Now that distance learners are increasing in both visibility and numbers, libraries are having to 'think outside the library' and come up with new and innovative ways to meet the needs of these unique users" (Ault 2002). In distance education, learners reside far away from their teachers and university campus. Libraries can play a pivotal role to provide access to electronic resources to distance learning students and instructors (Burgstahler 2002). Barron (2002) states that libraries are in the business of helping students get information "they want, when they want it, and getting it to them regardless of where they are physically located."

Library is an essential segment of a university which plays a significant role in achieving the objectives of higher education (Haider 2004). Schneider (2001) pointed out that the "regional campus libraries play important and unique roles in the campuses and communities they serve" (p. 122). The technological development in the last decade, specifically the Internet, has created many opportunities to distance learners (Argentati 1999).

Cooper (2000) explained that although distance education has gained popularity in the USA, very little attention was given to the problems of providing distance library services. Gadd (2002) highlighted the findings of the survey conducted by a group comprised of five members of the library staff at Loughborough University. The following recommendations to improve distance library services were suggested:

- Strategic changes
- Policy changes
- Procedural changes
- Web improvements

Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) was established in 1974 to deliver distance education in Pakistan. AIOU is a unique institution because of its philosophy, system, approach, functions and overall structure. The university with its main campus at Islamabad has a vast network of 32 regional campuses and centers in Pakistan as well as in the Middle East. The University has been offering different programs from functional courses for illiterates and semi-literates to undergraduate, master degrees, MPhil and doctoral level through the distance learning system (Allama Iqbal Open University 2006).

Libraries at AIOU serve the distance community by a hierarchical system with the central library at the main campus and branch libraries at the regional campuses. The primary objective of the central library is to acquire, store and make available to the students, faculty, tutors and full time employees of the university, all forms of recorded information in the fields pertinent to the objectives of the university; to support the writing of

courses and pursuit of research, and cooperate with other libraries in promoting the educational well being of the community. The branch libraries are situated in the main campuses of the University in the larger cities of the country. These libraries are serving at the regional campuses at Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan, Peshawar, Quetta, Karachi, Hyderabad, Mirpur and Gilgit. The regional campus libraries serve the students, tutors and employees of the University (Hasan 1982). AIOU triennial report (1997-1999) highlights the facts and figures about libraries as:

Twenty-eight Regional libraries are trying to meet the needs of students. Mainly books for postgraduate level courses have been provided. The main campus library sent a total of 21,877 books to 22 regional libraries. Recently Internet and a computer is also provided in the Regional libraries and Central libraries. (p. 54)

Iqbal (2004) discussed that AIOU has two different categories of library: the central library at the main campus and regional libraries located at the Regional offices and various model study centers. To conduct a comparative study of student support services of Eastern and Western institutions with special reference to AIOU and UKOU (United Kingdom Open University), he surveyed 145 distance students of the London and Islamabad regions. He reported that the mean scores of the two regions' students were 3.9 and 3.2 respectively for the statement 'You have visited the Regional library.' The mean scores of the regions' students with respect to the statement 'Regional Library is equipped with sufficient material and audio visual aids to meet students' needs' were 3.7 and 2.7 respectively.

The AIOU Annual Vice Chancellor report (2004-05) describes the resources and services at the Central library. The present collection of the library is 117,000 (books, theses, periodicals, reports, audio-visual materials, etc.). The library provides free Internet and reference services to the students, faculty and staff of the University. The Higher Education Commission-sponsored digital library with 22,000 (including 11,000 full text) journals of international repute is accessible in the library as well as from the academics departments. The users can access the basic information, rules and regulations, collection development policy, technical processing policy, special collection, and senior staff profiles of the library at <http://www.aiou.edu.pk>. A private photocopy machine is also available in the library at a nominal charge. In addition to these resources and services, the library has an extensive publication exchange program with various institutions and organizations within and outside the country, including Open Universities. The AIOU Annual Vice Chancellor report (2005-06) describes:

Libraries are essential organs of educational institutions. Since the AIOU is offering a variety of programs at the postgraduate Level, therefore the

functioning of full-fledged library backed by qualified staff is inevitable. During 2005-06, with the help of JICA, new TV and DVD players have been provided to Regions to facilitate the visiting students. (p. 31)

Bhatti and Arif (2006) recommended that a committee of librarians and academics from various library science schools should be established for educational material of high quality which will be helpful to overcome the shortage of appropriately-designed self-instructional materials. To provide efficient library support to the distance community, modern telecommunication technologies should be employed.

A survey of 200 students enrolled in postgraduate programs of the Faculty of Education in Islamabad and Rawalpindi regions was conducted by Iqbal and Huma (2007) to assess the quality of student support services being provided by AIOU. The survey was administered by the authors during a distance students workshop held at the main campus. The response rate was 100%. The findings of the study showed that the respondents were satisfied with the statements: 'Library and IT facility', 'Library opening hours' and 'The range and availability of books, journal and other library resources'. The percent scores of the statements of Islamabad and Rawalpindi regions were 87%, 62%, 89% & 89%, 54%, 87% respectively. The respondents were highly dissatisfied with the statements: 'Availability of online learning and teaching resources' and 'Library and IT training and advice.'

AIM OF THE STUDY

The literature revealed that neither the Higher Education Commission nor any other organization in the country has provided any guidelines or policies for library services to distance users. The aim of the study is to assess the tutors' perceptions about location and physical setup, collection, resources, and services of the central library as well as regional libraries of the University all over Pakistan including Azad Jammu & Kashmir. Being the first study of its kind in Pakistan, it will be helpful to improve the distance services to the tutors and infrastructure of the libraries of the University.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A semi-structured questionnaire was designed and pre-tested to collect data about tutors' satisfaction with the regional libraries as well as the central library at the main campus of the university at Islamabad. The tool comprised of 10 closed-ended questions, department, age, gender, employment status, frequency of library visit, satisfaction with location and physical setup, collection, resources and services of the libraries. A 5-point Likert type scale with response categories was used to get responses from the subjects of the

study. Space was also provided for additional comments and suggestions at the end of the questionnaire.

A sample of one hundred tutors teaching in thirty-two regions all over the country was selected randomly. The questionnaire to the regional tutors was sent by registered post along with self-addressed stamped envelope through Regional Directors by the Directorate of Regional Services Office of the University during spring semester 2007. Initially the response was 40%. Due to poor response, three reminders were sent followed by phone calls. The tutors' response was 86% after these efforts. The data collected through the tutors' survey are analyzed and interpreted in the following section.

THE AIOU TUTORS COMMUNITY

The tutors were asked to mention their department, age, gender and employment status. The respondents belonged to the four faculties: Arabic and Islamic Studies, Education, Sciences and Social Sciences. Their experience ranged from one year to forty years. There were 8 (9.3%) female and 78 (90.7%) male participants (Figure 1).

All respondents (86) indicated their age. A majority of the respondents (40, 46.5%) belonged to the age category of 41-50, followed by 29 (33.7%) in the age group of 21-40. Only 17 (19.8%) of the respondents were above 50 years of age (Figure 2).

The response rate of various regional campuses located in Federal area, provinces of Punjab, NWFP, Baluchistan, Sind and territory of Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) was 3.49 (3.5%), 50 (50%), 16.28 (16.3%), 10.47 (10.5%), 12.79 (12.8%) and 6.98 (7.0%) respectively as shown in Figure 3.

A total of 85 respondents mentioned their employment status (Figure 4). The majority (56, 65.9%) of them were serving as full time teachers at institutions other than AIOU, 19 (22.4%) were government servants whereas five respondents were doing private jobs. Only three respondents

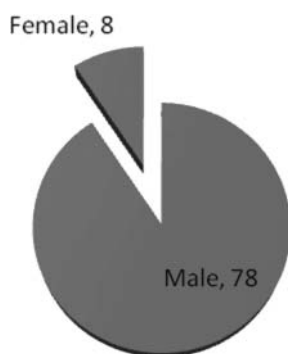


FIGURE 1 Frequency distribution of respondents' gender.

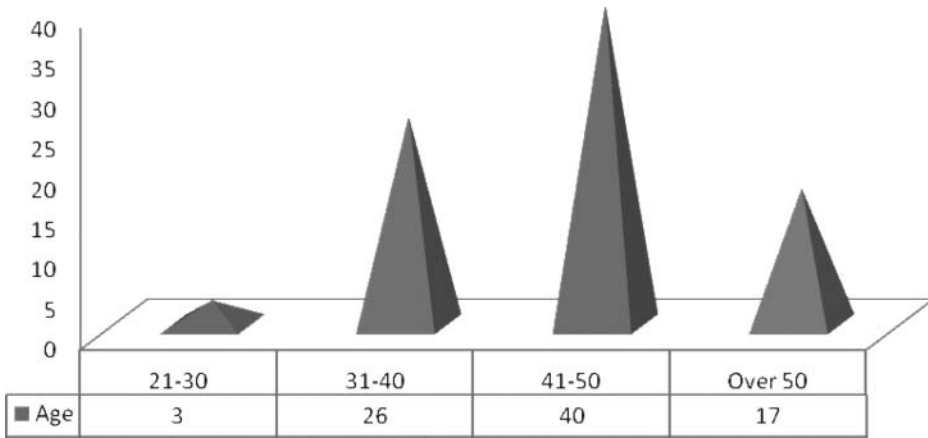


FIGURE 2 Frequency distribution of respondents' age.

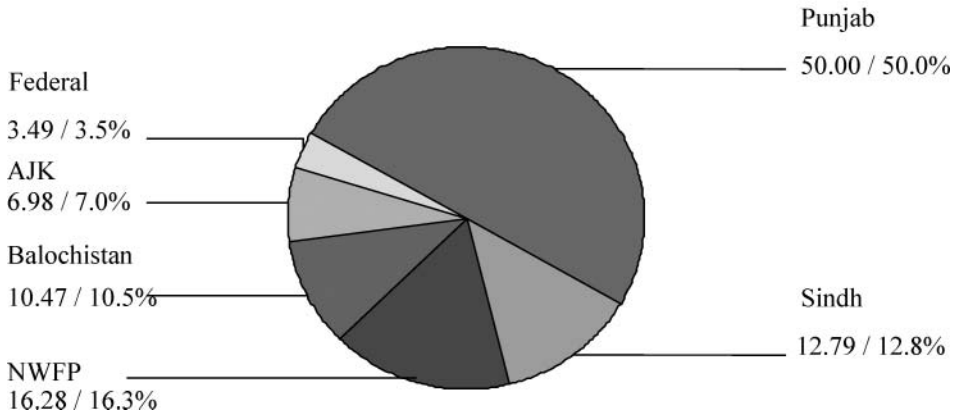


FIGURE 3 Response rate of various regions.

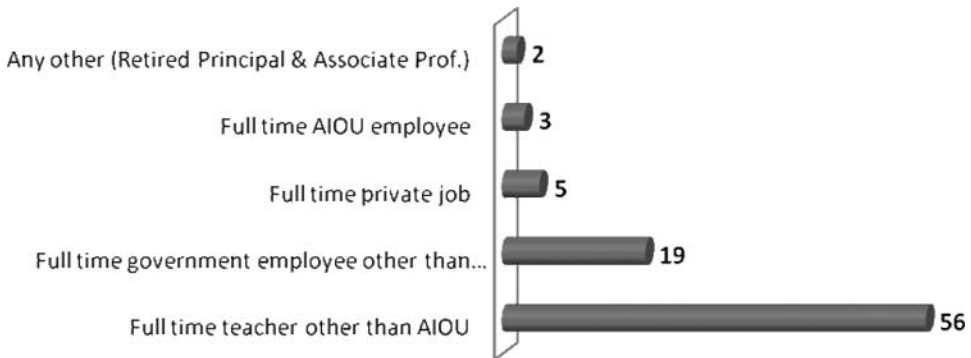


FIGURE 4 Frequency distribution of employment status.

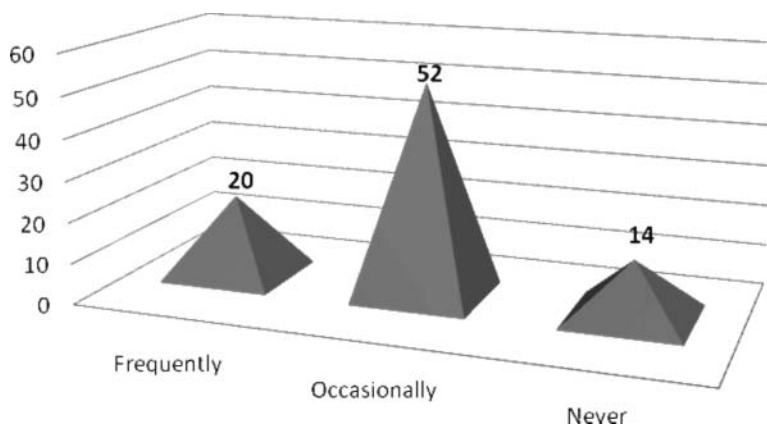


FIGURE 5 Frequency distribution of the use of regional libraries.

were full time AIOU employees. Two retired academicians working as tutor also responded.

USE OF CENTRAL AND REGIONAL LIBRARIES

The response shows that the majority of the respondents (52, 60.5%) occasionally visited, 20 visited frequently while 14 never visited the regional libraries (Figure 5). The frequency distribution of the use of the central library at Islamabad shows that the majority (49, 57%) never visited while 33 visited occasionally. Only four used the central library frequently (Figure 6).

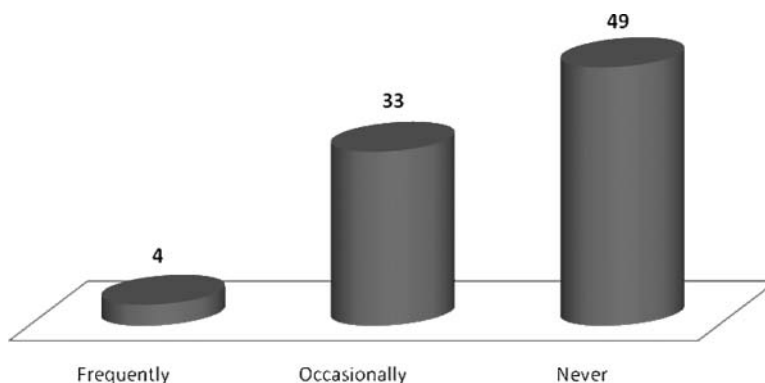


FIGURE 6 Frequency distribution of the use of central library.

SATISFACTION WITH LOCATION AND PHYSICAL SETUP, COLLECTION, RESOURCES AND SERVICES OF THE LIBRARIES

The tutors were asked a comprehensive and important question that was comprised of twenty-four statements. The respondents expressed their opinions about the statements. The respondents were provided a 5-point Likert type scale to express their satisfaction with the location and physical setup, collection, resources and services of the libraries. Descriptive statistics of respondents' opinions about the statements with mean rank order are presented in Tables 1 to 4.

Satisfaction with Location and Physical Setup

The respondents expressed their opinion on the five statements (Table 1). They agreed with the statements: (1) 'Library is within easy access' (Mean = 4.28), (2) 'Library's environment (noise level, heating, cooling, lighting, furniture, cleanliness, etc.) is conducive to study' (Mean = 3.86) and (3) 'Individual study carrels are adequate' (Mean = 3.53). They expressed no opinion on the statements: 'Photocopy machine is easily accessible' (Mean = 3.21) and 'The present library building fulfills the needs of library users' (Mean = 2.91).

Satisfaction with Library Collection

The mean rank order of the statements given in Table 2 shows that the respondents expressed no opinion about the statements: (2) 'Library collection is adequate for my needs' (Mean = 3.22), (3) 'Library collection is current and relevant' (Mean = 3.13), (4) 'Journal collection is adequate' (Mean = 3.09) and (5) 'Library provides adequate online databases' (Mean = 2.69).

TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics of Satisfaction with Location and Physical Setup

Rank	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Library is within easy access	4.28	.71
2	Library's environment (noise level, heating, cooling, lights, furniture, cleanliness, etc.) is conducive to study	3.86	1.08
3	Individual study carrels are adequate	3.53	1.11
4	Photocopy machine is easily accessible	3.21	1.22
5	The present library building fulfills the needsof library users	2.91	1.33

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = No Opinion, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

TABLE 2 Descriptive Statistics of Satisfaction with Library Collection

Rank	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Library collection is well organized and easy to find	3.56	1.13
2	Library collection is adequate for my needs	3.22	1.09
3	Library collection is current and relevant	3.13	1.27
4	Journal collection is adequate	3.09	1.13
5	Library provides adequate online databases	2.69	1.25

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = No Opinion, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

However they agreed only with the statement: (1) 'Library's collection is well organized and easy to find' (Mean = 3.56).

Satisfaction with Library Resources

The mean rank order of statements given in Table 3 shows that the respondents agreed with the statements: (1) 'I use library to prepare lectures for workshops' (Mean = 3.92), 'Library staff is helpful, knowledgeable and competent' (Mean = 3.91) and 'I use library when I have special AIOU assignment' (Mean = 3.89). The Mean values (3.36 & 3.29) show that the respondents expressed no opinion about the statements: (4) 'I use library for personal purpose' and (5) 'I use library to write units of AIOU study material'.

Satisfaction with Library Services

The mean rank order of statements given in Table 4 shows that respondents expressed no opinion about the library services: (2) 'The library hours meet my needs' (Mean = 3.47), (3) 'Borrowing books from library is easy' (Mean = 3.45), (4) 'Use of library catalog is easy' (Mean = 3.43), (5) 'Library staff provides timely reference service' (Mean = 3.41), (6) 'Library membership

TABLE 3 Descriptive Statistics of Satisfaction with Library Resources

Rank	Statement	Mean	SD
1	I use library to prepare lectures for workshops	3.92	.82
2	Library staff is helpful, knowledgeable and competent	3.91	1.17
3	I use library only when I have special AIOU assignment	3.89	.86
4	I use library for personal purpose	3.36	1.09
5	I use library to write units of AIOU study material	3.29	1.00

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = No Opinion, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

TABLE 4 Descriptive Statistics of Satisfaction with Library Services

Rank	Statement	Mean	SD
1	I am satisfied with the overall quality of library services	3.57	1.14
2	The library hours meet my needs	3.47	1.08
3	Borrowing books from library is easy	3.45	1.16
4	Use of library catalog is easy	3.43	1.06
5	Library staff provides timely reference service	3.41	1.16
6	Library membership process is easy	3.30	1.15
7	Library provides Internet service	2.74	1.26
8	Library borrows information material from other libraries to fulfill the needs of the tutors	2.71	1.15
9	Library staff provides reference service through Internet and e-mail	2.68	1.21

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = No Opinion, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

process is easy' (Mean = 3.30), (7) 'Library provides Internet service' (Mean = 2.74), (8) 'Library borrows information material from other libraries to fulfill the needs of the tutors' (Mean = 2.71) and (9) 'Library staff provides reference service through Internet and e-mail' (Mean = 2.68). However, the respondents agreed only with the statement: (1) 'I am satisfied with the overall quality of library services' (Mean = 3.57).

Opinions of the Respondents by Gender

The statistical analysis ($t = .084$, $\text{Sig.} = .013$) shows that there was a significant difference between the opinion of female and male respondents. Female tutors were more satisfied with the overall quality of library services (Table 5).

USE OF INFORMATION SOURCES OTHER THAN AIOU LIBRARIES NETWORK

The last question of the survey asked the respondents to pinpoint sources other than those in the university libraries, which they used to fulfill their information needs. The results show that 49 (57%) respondents used personal collections followed by 38 (44.5%) respondents who used the Internet.

TABLE 5 Results of T-test Regarding Gender Wise Opinion

Statement	Gender	N	Mean	t	Sig.
I am satisfied with the overall quality of library services	Female	7	3.61	.084	.013
	Male	69	3.57		

Twenty-six respondents (30.2%) used friends' resources while 14 (16.3%) respondents availed themselves the distance library services. Only 13 (15.1%) respondents approached the university's faculty whereas 20 (23.3%) respondents got help from the university administrative staff. In addition to those sources, 64% of tutors used the following libraries all over the country:

- Agha Khan University Library, Karachi
- Agriculture University Library, Faisalabad
- Education University Library, Lahore
- Gomal University Library, Dera Ismail Khan
- Govt. College Library, Jhang
- Govt. College Library, Mirpur
- Govt. Commerce College Library, Hyderabad
- Govt. Degree College Library, Zhob
- Islamia College Library, Peshawar
- Jinnah Public Library, Gujranwala
- Jinnah Public Library, Sahiwal
- Khurshid National Library, Muzaffarabad
- University of Peshawar Library
- IER University of Punjab Library, Lahore
- Public Library, Turbat
- Punjab Public Library, Lahore
- Shahnawaz Bhutto Library, Larkana
- University of Sindh Library, Hyderabad
- Karachi University Library

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Since all the questions of the survey were closed-ended, the respondents were asked to give their additional comments or suggestions at the end of the questionnaire; 51 responded.

The majority of the respondents suggested that proper library building, staff, furniture, the latest books, reference books, computers, a photocopier and journals relevant to the programs being offered in the regions should be provided to the libraries. Some of the respondents also emphasized that the existing library building needs proper expansion as well as air conditioning. The library hours of services should be increased as most of the tutorial classes are held in the afternoon.

The respondents suggested that the library should provide the Internet access to the tutors in the libraries. Most of the respondents requested that the University should arrange library information literacy programs for the tutors. Other responses indicated that borrowing privileges should also be provided

to the tutors. One of the respondents emphasized that the library should be automated and the OPAC of the AIOU libraries should be accessible online.

CONCLUSION

The respondents showed dissatisfaction with the borrowing service, interlibrary loan and the collection of the libraries. They suggested that the existing libraries need extension. The majority of the respondents were not satisfied with the resources, for example, furniture, computers, software, photocopier, multimedia, fax machine, telephone and audio video equipment. Most of the respondents pointed out that the University should initiate an information literacy program and a Web-based OPAC should be provided to the library users. They were in favor that service hours of the libraries should be increased. The tutors also used information sources other than those in the AIOU libraries. For this purpose, they used friends' resources, university libraries, public libraries and national library of Pakistan in the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to improve library services for AIOU tutors:

1. The University should frame standards for the distance library and information services to the tutors.
2. The proper library setup with all the necessary facilities (lighting, heating, air conditioning and library furniture, etc.) should be established in the regional campuses and centers of the university all over Pakistan, including Azad Jammu and Kashmir territory.
3. It is imperative to improve the library services available to the tutors. For this purpose, libraries must be allocated sufficient budgets to purchase the latest library materials.
4. The Internet access should be provided to all the regional libraries.
5. Interlibrary loan service should be provided to the tutors.
6. The tutors of the University should be allowed to borrow library material.
7. All the libraries should be automated along with the provision of the Web OPAC so that the libraries are easily accessible to the tutors in remote areas of the country.
8. The University should establish an agreement among all the libraries as to which services may be beneficial for the teachers, tutors and students of the university all over Pakistan.

9. The Information literacy program should be initiated for the entire distance community of the University.
10. The majority of the tutors used information resources other than those at AIOU regional libraries, so the University should establish an agreement among all the libraries as to which services may be beneficial for them.
11. The library satisfaction survey of tutors must be conducted on the regular basis to assess the quality of library services available to distance tutors of the University.

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