

Analysis of Assignments' Assessment for Distance Learners in Single Vs Dual Mode Institutions

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Abstract

Most of learning of distance learners took place because of assignments that learners prepare following the given schedule. On the other hand, assignments are also a component of formative assessment process in assessment of distance learners. Present study was an attempt to discuss and evaluate the role and skill of personnel and institutions regarding different aspects of assessment of assignments to search out shortcomings in the process. This was a questionnaire based survey study. Respondents of this study were 625 distance learners from one single mode and two dual mode universities in Punjab. It concluded that institutions need attention to promote positive traditions among distance learners and tutors to establish and implement standard rules for quality evaluation of assignments. All distance education institutions are not meeting the criteria to evaluate assignments of learners. Assignment evaluation in teacher education courses was poor as compared to science and arts subjects. Dual mode institutions were performing better than single mode distance education institutions.

Keywords: Assignments, distance learning, evaluation, single mode institutions, dual mode institutions.

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Introduction

Assessment is critical in determining the direction of student effort and is vital in providing a channel of communication between students and their educators for campus-based as well as in distance learning context (Macdonald, 2004, p.218). Assignment is taken as a compulsory component of formative assessment process and also a component of teaching and learning in distance education system. Most of learning of distance learners took place through assignments. Academicians work hard to propose such assignments that can help learners to cover course and get valuable learning experiences in learning process.

Different educators and scholars have discussed role of assignments in distance learning from different aspects. Kocher (1990) opines that assignment writing improves students' interest in study, improves writing habit of learners, make learners habitual to work independently and help tutors to understand learning difficulties of learners. Chander (1991) determines that only system of a consistent and frequent assignment makes distance education effective. Matheswaran (2005) elaborates that assignments are necessary to make learners active, motivated for study, develop methods for collecting information, practice writing and complete tasks timely. Pandey and Parveez (2006) explain that assignments help to assess learner's understanding about the course. These make possible for learners to get advice of tutors about their learning deficiencies and learn ways to improve themselves. Results of assignments have value for learners. These inform them about their position in the course.

Ali, Mehmood and Mahmood (2011) elaborate that assignments are considered a compulsory component in distance learning process. Students attend tutorials and write assignments of each course during a semester. In this way, learning in distance education is managed and made possible through the compulsory component of assignment work. Jumani, Rahman, Iqbal and Chishti (2011) opine that students improve in their studies through assignments. For institutions, assignment is a source of internal assessment of learners. Distance learners prepare assignments and submit them to tutors. Tutors mark assignments and submit results to the institution. In this way, institution manages records of internal assessment of learners.

Earl (2013) perceives that assignment is a source to build teacher students communication. Students are given assignments along with instructions to complete them. While preparing assignments, students ask questions from their tutors. After evaluating assignments, tutors give feedback to learners about their performance.

These are most helpful to reduce gap between learners and educators and make them social and active.

Value of assignments in distance education indicates that assignment designing, its writing and evaluation are valuable skills for those who are related to the process of distance education may be as planners, organizers, educators or students. Active and skillful work of personnel involved in assignment preparation, their dissemination to students and accurate evaluation of students' assignment is important to provide quality education to its users. Therefore, academicians take the task of construction of assignments' questions and checking the quality of marking of assignment as one of key responsibilities while working in an organization. Distance learners focus to learn the art to write assignment on ideal basis keeping in view the objectives of task. Tutors feel need to be trained in learning the demand of their job.

Higher education commission of Pakistan has chartered two universities, namely Allama Iqbal Open University and Virtual University in Pakistan to launch courses through distance education mode in the country. Since 2008, some of the formal mode universities like as Bahauddin Zakaria University, Multan, Gomal University Dera Ismail Khan, Government College University Faisalabad, Peshawar University and The Islamia University of Bahawalpur have also started courses through distance learning along with the formal courses according to policy of Higher Education Commission of Pakistan to discourage private education. Thus, these formal universities have turned into dual mode institutions in Pakistan. Publically, working of distance education institutions is criticized and mostly assignments' evaluation process is more criticized by critics. Therefore, this study on "Analysis of assignments' assessment for distance learners in single versus dual mode institutions" was conducted. It was necessary to discuss and evaluate different aspects regarding the issues under discussion to provide guidelines to organizers, tutors and learners to think about their roles and applying measures to perform their responsibilities according to technique of teaching in distance education.

Objectives of the study

Present study aimed to;

1. Evaluate attitude of personnel (tutors, institutional authorities and learners) involved in the assessment process of assignments of distance learners.
2. Explore deficiencies in assessment process of assignments in single versus dual mode distance education institutions.

Research Questions

1. What is attitude of distance learners towards assignments?
2. Do tutors evaluate assignments of distance learners according to rules of distance education?
3. Do institutions play their role to monitor the assessment process of assignments?

Review of Related Literature

Objectives and demand of the study was to explore and discuss issues under discussion in relation to distance education institutions who are responsible to plan rules, implement their policies and monitor activities regarding evaluators/ tutors and learners. Therefore, material was analyzed and discussed in three parts and has reported below.

Role of distance learner while preparing assignments

Modern media has provided opportunity to learners to offer a variety of ways of organizing learning opportunities in distance education courses. Electronic media has offered new ways to access and combine information and possibility to keep in touch with peers and tutors. Now students of virtual model of distance learning belong to an electronic community of learners and do less longer work in isolation (Macdonald, 2004, p. 215). But still, assignment writing is difficult task for distance learners who face isolation most of the time especially in correspondence model of education.

Distance education institutions give rules for writing assignments to their learners. Good learners follow these rules and lay down foundation to follow good tradition but some learners adopt malpractices and do not take the task important for them. Akhter (2014) describes that distance learners do not follow rules for preparing assignments properly. They request tutors to award marks for assignments without submitting. Those who submit assignments do not prepare them by self. They buy assignments from the market or copy assignments of others.

Various studies have pointed out different reasons for malpractices of distance learners to write assignments. Afridi (2008, p. 103) has pointed out lack of motivation of learners to work hard. Jumani et. al. (2011) elaborate that low learning level, overloaded study schedule, poor writing skill of learners and tutors' irresponsible way of marking are reasons for adopting poor styles to response

assignments. These show that students' characteristics, organization's system, rules and defective monitoring of process are reasons for failure of achievement of goals of assignments in distance learning. Likewise, a view point as described by Matheswaran (2005, P.200) about distance education "weak contact between learners, possibility for discussions between learners only during the meetings, feeling of isolation in correspondence model and lack of sense of competition and encouragement" are also reasons for students' lack of attention and low performance in preparation of quality assignments.

In accurate marking sometimes also inspire learners to work in irresponsible way. Unfortunately, some tutors do not evaluate assignments properly (Shah, 2004; Iqbal, 2011 & Akhter, 2014) that discourage learners to prepare quality assignments. For effective and smooth working of distance education system, distance learners need to focus the theme of assignments in distance learning. They need to focus that;

1. Assignments are given to learners to force them to study the course. Therefore, assignment writing means "distance learners have studied whole course" (Akhter (2015, p.251). They have to cover course contents studying thoroughly, getting help of tutors, fellow students or may be by any other way.
2. Learners have to complete their assignments within stipulated time period (Rashid, 2000). Completing assignment timely means learners are following schedule of institution. This also means, learners are working regularly or may be on weekly basis according to a schedule.
3. Learners need to search relevant materials from multiple sources to attempt ideal assignments (Matheswaran, 2005). They must review study guides thoroughly and consult the recommended sources given at the end of topics/ chapters.
4. Submitting assignments to tutors timely and passing them ensures that learners are eligible for appearing in the examinations (Goel & Goel, 2000). In case of award of poor marks in assignments supports that there is no assurance for students' success in examinations. It is necessary for learners to prepare assignments according to schedule, submit them to tutors timely and ensure that they have secured minimum passing marks in assignments.
5. In case of facing difficulty to; search materials, understanding the tasks assigned to complete assignments or answering questions properly, learners should consult tutors assigned to them (AIOU, 2007). They can discuss their problems with tutors to get assistance to overcome their problems.

6. Submitting ready-made assignments or copying assignments of others can be pointed out by tutors. On the other hand this can be a reason for ineligibility for appearing in examinations due to considering unsuccessful or failed in assignment component in a course. Suppose, learner is not evaluated objectively or efficiently by tutors and he/ she appears in examination, there are much possibilities that he will not perform well in examinations and this can be a reason for weak performance of learners in the examinations.
7. Learners should consult their tutor in case the assignment is not returned. It is helpful for learners to receive and review the marked assignments. They should study comments of tutors carefully. This will help them to evaluate their comprehension about course contents, deficiencies in learning and ways to improve assignments in future.

Role of tutor while evaluating the assignments of learners

Tutors are indispensable for smooth working of distance education program. No institution even having ideal planning, effective study material, good ranking in institutions of distance education can work to achieve its goals without having dedicated, qualified and trained tutors. As, assignments have weight in the assessment process of distance education, it is important to appoint suitable tutors and train them to work according to the policy of distance education. According to Stevenson, Sander and Naylor, (1996) assessment of assignments has always been a fundamental responsibility of tutors in distance education.

Research shows that assignment evaluation needs tutors' expertise to evaluate it with consideration and provide supportive feedback on it. Feedback may be provided adopting any style; declarative, reiterative and interrogative styles by evaluator but should be effective and supportive for learners. Supportive feedback means the feedback that helps learners as well as learning process, reflect learners' performance on all dimensions of learning levels and redirect learners towards their learning aims (Wion, 2008). Ideally, feedback remarks on assignments should cover all levels of evaluation. These should be cognitive, affective, Meta cognitive, motivational, developmental and social in nature (APA, 2002).

Fredrickson (2003) views that positive emotion as curiosity and joy motivate learners to work with zeal in future. Ultimately, this encourages students to work in enjoyable ways. Therefore, tutors should give comments in a way that emotions of students can be provoked. Schunk, Pintrich, and Meece (2008) assert to provide cognitive feedback on assignments. They view that feedback should represent accuracy of student's work adding the corrective information. It should invite

students to think about the novel methods that they can adopt in future. Wion (2008) insists to provide developmental feedback to learners. He argues that distance learners are from multiple groups and work differently to each other. It is valuable for them to relate comments to students' development regarding the course. This can be in a way that first appreciate learner for his progress and then motivate and invite student to apply knowledge in new perspectives. APA (2002) suggests tutors to provide encouraging remarks that should reflect self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-competency for learners. Furthermore, feedback should give message to learners to interact others in completing their tasks in future.

Research indicates that many tutors are not well trained to evaluate assignments according to theme of distance education. In fact, tutors should be "content related information giver" (Conrad, 2002, p. 221) and experts to deliver in distance learning. Murphy (2007) has pointed out that tutors appointed to guide distance learners are expert in their subjects but unfortunately not trained in how to guide students in their studies and enable them to think critically and work independently.

Manjulika and Reddy (1999) state that tutors provide poor feedback on assignments. Many tutors neither write comments on assignments nor return assignments to learners. They do this because their concepts about assignment marking and its role to develop two way communications between tutor and learners are not clear. Jumani et. al. (2011) indicates that tutors superficially tick over the assignments. They take assignment marking casual so give high marks to educationally poor students. This casual behavior of tutors discourages the hard working students to prepare assignments following standard rules. Akhter (2012) states, tutors' comments do not help learners to elaborate weak parts of their assignments. Murphy (2007, PP. 86–87) elaborates;

While writing feedback at a distance to people, they hardly know to make some assumptions about the students and their needs. It is easy to get it wrong with disastrous consequences or to hold back in case the analysis isn't correct. Therefore, tutors' command on students' expectations and needs helps them to guide confidently and this can be developed by their training.

Above discussion explains that training of tutors to educate them about the value and theme of assignment writing and its objective evaluation is necessary.

Responsibilities of Distance Education Institutions

No doubt, assignments are offered to learners by the institutions. Academicians are responsible to device and implement rules for assessment of distance learners. Keeping in view the scope of distance education in present situation, academicians working in the distance education institutions should keep in mind that they are responsible for quality of education through distance education in the country. With respect to the assignments, academicians need to propose good assignment questions and make rules to ensure accurate and objective marking of assignments. Stevenson, Sander and Naylor (1996) describe that distance teaching institutions disseminate guides for tutors to provide tips on good practices about tutoring. These guides are of immense value for new tutors who are not familiar with techniques to guide distance learners. Tutors can perform their duties following guidelines of tutoring guides.

Assignment paper construction is duty of the institution. Institutions assign this duty to their academicians. Murugan (1998) suggests academicians to propose balanced, comprehensive, and provoking assignment questions following the distance education format. Macdonald (2004) suggests that assignments should be related to course contents and time bound. Research shows that institutions provide no marking criteria/ guidelines to tutors to mark assignments. For development of good assignment questions, academicians should keep in mind the points given below.

1. Assignment questions must inspire learners to study multiple materials.
2. Questions should be related to instructional objectives of the course.
3. Each question must provide possibilities to generate multiple correct answers to respondents.
4. Aim of assignment questions should be to enable learners to prepare for final examination and insist them to study whole course.
5. Assignment questions should be framed keeping in mind the level of learners. It is suitable to propose combination of easy and difficult questions in assignments. This will give confidence to average and low achievers as well as motivate high achievers to perform well and work hard.
6. It is good to divide a question into parts. In case of dividing a question into parts, each part must be allocated different marks.
7. A panel of experts must device assignment and each member must evaluate the suitability of each assignment question.
8. It is good to add instructions for students to attempt the assignment. These instructions must cover all directions regarding the length of response, content selection, writing pattern, at least number of sources needed to be consulted and scheme for marking of assignment items.

9. It is good to prepare a guideline booklet to mark each question of the assignment. It will help institution to provide this guideline booklet to the tutors for marking of assignments. This can help all tutors to mark assignments following same scheme for marking.
10. A plagiarism check of assignments should be made mandatory and its report should be kept in record.

Procedure of the Study

Present study was descriptive in nature. Researcher adopted survey method because of its suitability to search answers of questions under investigation.

Population of the study

This study was delimited to public sector universities, Master's level courses and five districts of Punjab namely Multan, Sahiwal, Faisalabad, Layya and Vehari. In these five districts, two single mode universities namely Allama Iqbal Open University and Virtual University were offering master's level courses through distance mode of education. On the other hand, Bahauddin Zakaria University, Multan and Government College University, Faisalabad working as dual mode institutions. Therefore, masters' level students of five universities were defined as population of this study.

Sample of the study

Sample of this study was chosen applying the multistage sampling. At first stage, one single mode distance education university (Allama Iqbal Open) and two from the dual mode universities (Bahauddin Zakaria University, Multan and Government College University, Faisalabad) were randomly selected. On second stage, four master's level programs namely MA Education, M.Ed., MA English and M. Sc. Mathematics were chosen according to convenience sampling. At last stage, 625 students were chosen through convenience sampling.

Research tool of the study

A close ended questionnaire of 22 items on four point Likert Scale was developed. Its' content validity and face validity was determined through expert opinion method. Before finalizing the tool for data collection, a pilot testing was done on a sample of 35 individuals. Reliability of tool was calculated by Cronbach's Alpha method. Cronbach's Alpha value of finally collected data from 625 students was 0.872. All items had r value above than 0.85. This pointed out that tool was highly reliable.

Data collection

Data of the study was collected during last workshop/ tutorial sessions conducted before end of term examinations. Dual mode institutions selected in sample were organizing their programs following week end program model. Therefore, schedule of workshop/ week end tutorials from all universities included in sample was collected. Researcher approached students during workshops/ tutorials. They were requested to fill in the questionnaire keeping in view their experience during whole study period. On the whole 275 distance learners from single mode and 350 of dual mode universities submitted their responses to the researcher.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed applying statistical procedures of mean scores and t test using SPSS.

Results and Interpretation

Data of the study was analyzed calculating mean scores and mean scores of respondents from single mode and dual mode institutions were further compared applying t- test statistics on data. Results have discussed below dividing them in categories related to role of learner, tutors and institution. To explain results, mean score 2.50 and above was taken as criterion to accept the statement.

Distance Learners and Assignments

Table 1 exhibits learners' attitude towards assignments. According to rules of distance education, assignments are compulsory for them. They should realize that unless, preparing and submitting assignments to tutors timely following the pre-decided and pre-communicated schedule, successful completion of course award of degree is not possible. But;

Data shows that majority of students do not follow the rules. They have a perception that assignments submission is not necessary to be able to appear in examinations. This explores that institutions do not implement the rule to compel students to submit a standard assignments. Without submitting assignments, students are allowed to appear in examinations. This is the reason because of students do not follow schedule of assignments submission.

A positive attitude pointed out by the data is that majority of students of dual mode institutions consult and cite authentic sources while answering the questions of assignments. This explores that dual mode institutions are better than single mode distance education institutions to teach students to write and submit assignments before examinations.

Comparison of responses of single mode and dual mode institutions indicates significant mean difference between groups except of 2nd item. Mean score of response of students of dual mode institutions is greater than mean score of single mode institutions. This explores better attitude of dual mode institution towards assignments. In other words, dual mode institutions are trying to promote better positive attitude towards assignments among their learners.

Table 1

Mean comparison regarding distance learners' attitude towards assignments

Sr. no	Statements	University	Mean	S.D	Std. Error of mean	Mean difference	t- score	Sig. 2 tailed
1	Students know that unless submitting assignments, it is impossible to appear in examinations.	Single mode	2.00	0.87	0.05	-0.29	-3.90	0.000
		Dual mode	2.30	0.99	0.05			
		Total	2.17					
2	Students strictly follow the given schedule for submitting assignments.	Single mode	2.04	0.88	0.05	-0.10	-1.41	0.158
		Dual mode	2.18	0.88	0.04			
		Total	2.14					
3	Students consult and cite multiple authentic sources while answering the questions of assignments	Single mode	2.23	0.87	0.05	-0.44	-6.16	0.000
		Dual mode	2.75	0.89	0.04			
		Total	2.53					

Tutors and Assignments

Table 2 signifies tutors' approach to promote positive attitude among students to prepare assignments according to the set standard. According to data, students admitted that their tutors guide them to search additional resources because it was necessary for students to be able to prepare assignments on ideal basis. Mean score of dual mode institutions falls in acceptance region and also above the score of single mode institutions. This explores that tutors of dual mode institutions better guide students as compared to tutors appointed to guide students of single mode institutions (mean difference= -0.42, t= -5.53, P= 0.000).

Data also exhibits that mean score of items mentioned in series 2 to 5 are below the accepted value of mean (2.50) and have significant mean difference between scores of single and dual mode institutions. This explores that assignments are not marked carefully. Tutors do not motivate students to work hard. They do not educate students about the philosophy to include assignments in the process of distance learning. But, dual mode institutions are better than single mode institutions.

An appreciating attitude of tutors pointed out by the data (item 4) is that tutors communicate students about the result of assignments. They do not think that result will be communicated to students only in case of inquiry. Interestingly, results showed in table in series 3 to 5 have insignificant mean difference between scores of groups. This explores that tutors of single mode as well as of dual mode institutions have almost same attitudes.

Table 2*Mean comparison regarding tutors' attitude*

Sr. no	Statements	University	Mean	S.D.	Std. Error of Mean	Mean difference	t-score	Sig. 2 tailed
1	Tutors guide students to search additional resources for study/ reference materials to make students able to learn on ideal basis	Single mode	2.48	0.99	0.05	-0.42	-5.53	0.000
		Dual mode	2.91	0.93	0.04			
		Total	2.67					
2	Tutors mark assignments after evaluating the answers with consideration (point out mistakes, identify strengths)	Single mode	1.97	0.84	0.05	-.23	-3.30	0.001
		Dual mode	2.21	0.95	0.05			
		Total	2.11					
3	Tutor inspire you to work hard by discussion during tutorials/ meetings	Single mode	2.19	0.97	0.05	-.15	-1.92	0.054
		Dual mode	2.34	1.02	0.05			
		Total	2.28					
4	Tutors communicate results of assignments to students only in a case of inquiry.	Single mode	2.12	0.97	0.05	.07	0.95	0.340
		Dual mode	2.05	0.93	0.04			
		Total	2.08					
5	Tutors aware you about the basic philosophy of assignments in distance education process	Single mode	2.00	0.75	0.04	-.09	-1.43	0.153
		Dual mode	2.10	0.86	0.04			
		Total	2.05					

Command of tutors to evaluate assignments: Evaluation of assignment is an art. Table 3 shows results regarding the command of tutors to evaluate assignments. Data exhibits that mean score of all statements except of item 7 falls in the region of rejection (less than 2.50). This indicates a shocking situation in teaching as well as evaluation process of distance learning. This explores that tutors neither communicate plagiarism check report to students nor they reject plagiarized assignments of students. This communicates distance learners to adopt the habit of plagiarism in future too. On the other hand, this does not stress students to avoid copy work, prepare assignments by self and cite new and multiple references to strengthen their responses.

Data regarding items 3 to 6 and 8 identifies tutors' negligence to take the task to mark assignments according to rules and mark assignments adopting approach to highlight ways to improve, help learners to understand their mistakes and get corrections of mistakes. Data shows that learners get no encouragement to work hard and fail to understand novel ways to improve their performance in future. Tutors do not bother to improve their confidence because comments by the tutors exhibit no competency of students. Comparison of mean scores applying t-test statistics, a significant mean difference has found regarding all statements.

Mean score of response of dual mode institutions is higher than the mean of single mode institutions' students. This explores that assignments evaluation in dual mode institutions is better than the single mode institutions.

Table 3

Mean comparison regarding tutors command on assessment art

Sr. no	Statements	University	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Mean difference	t-score	Sig. 2 tailed
1	Report of plagiarism check is communicated to students	Single mode	1.87	0.78	0.047	-0.32	-4.90	0.000
		Dual mode	2.20	0.87	0.046			
		Total	2.05					
2	Tutors bother to reject the plagiarized work	Single mode	1.95	0.82	0.049	-0.49	-7.07	0.000
		Dual mode	2.44	0.91	.049			
		Total	2.22					
3	Tutors write comments on responses keeping in view all dimensions of learning aims	Single mode	1.93	0.82	0.049	-0.35	-4.97	0.000
		Dual mode	2.29	0.94	0.050			
		Total	2.13					
4	Comments of tutors open learning deficiencies to students	Single mode	1.88	0.81	0.049	-0.28	-4.10	0.000
		Dual mode	2.16	0.89	0.047			
		Total	2.04					

5	Tutors' comments represent accuracy of your work adding the corrective information	Single mode	1.76	0.77	0.046	-0.40	-6.04	0.000
		Dual mode	2.16	0.87	0.046			
		Total	1.98					
6	Tutors write comments on assignments in a manner that students get encouragement to work hard	Single mode	2.04	0.85	0.051	-0.25	-3.47	0.001
		Dual mode	2.29	0.94	0.050			
		Total	2.18					
7	Comments of tutors invite you to think about the novel methods that you can adopt in future.	Single mode	2.52	1.07	0.065	-0.22	-2.81	0.005
		Dual mode	2.74	0.91	0.048			
		Total	2.64					
8	Remarks on assignments reflect self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-competency for learners.	Single mode	2.03	0.88	0.053	-0.26	-3.60	0.000
		Dual mode	2.29	0.94	0.050			
		Total	2.18					

Role of institutions

Establishment of rules and norms regarding each aspect of teaching learning process is responsibility of the institutions. Table 4 exhibits results regarding the role of institutions to execute and monitor implementation of rules. According to data, mean score of items 3 to 5 falls in the criterion of acceptance. This explores that preparation, submission and passing of assignment is observed as a compulsory condition to announce a candidate passed in the course. Moreover, accuracy of scores in assignment is also observed by the authorities. But, students observed that substandard assignments were also accepted.

Mean score of items 1, 2 and 6 fall in the criterion to reject the statement (mean score less than 2.50). This explores that guides for students regarding techniques to prepare good assignments are not disseminated. Students are not awarded marks according to the efforts they do for writing assignments. In other words, no authority verifies validity of marks in assignments. Students feel that their results regarding assignments and examination do not relate to each other.

Mean scores of single mode distance education institutions is lower than the mean scores of dual mode institutions. This explores that dual mode institutions are performing better than dual mode institutions.

Table 4*Mean comparison regarding role of institutions*

Sr. no	Statements	University	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Mean difference	t- score	Sig. 2 tailed	
1	Institutions disseminate guides for students to provide tips on good practices to prepare standard assignments.	Single mode	2.02	0.91	0.05	-0.83	-	11.14	0.000
		Dual mode	2.85	0.93	0.05				
		Total	2.48						
2	Marks in assignments mostly match to the level of students' effort for writing assignments	Single mode	2.00	0.88	0.05	-0.23	-3.21	0.001	
		Dual mode	2.23	0.91	0.04				
		Total	2.13						
3	Students are not passed until they do not fulfill the requirement to prepare and pass assignment	Single mode	2.40	0.98	0.05	-0.68	-9.27	0.000	
		Dual mode	3.09	0.83	0.04				
		Total	2.78						
4	Validity of scores in assignments is verified by authorities	Single mode	2.39	0.98	0.05	-0.62	-8.35	0.000	
		Dual mode	3.01	0.82	0.04				
		Total	2.74						
5	Students failing to submit a standard assignments are allowed to sit in examinations	Single mode	2.73	0.95	0.05	-0.10	-1.38	0.166	
		Dual mode	2.84	0.92	0.04				
		Total	2.79						
6	Marks in assignments correlate with marks in papers	Single mode	2.11	0.97	0.05	-0.29	-3.60	0.000	
		Dual mode	2.40	1.03	0.05				
		Total	2.27						

Summative comparison of single versus dual mode institutions

Table 5 shows summative view about the different aspects reviewed in this study. Data exhibits a significant mean difference between scores of single and dual mode institutions regarding all aspects except the aspect second. Mean score of dual mode institutions regarding learners' attitude, tutors' command on evaluation of assignment and institutions' role are higher than the mean score of single mode institutions. This indicates a space for single mode institutions to more focus to improve their process.

Table 5*Mean comparison between single and dual mode institutions*

Sr. no	Aspect	University	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Mean difference	t- score	Sig. 2 tailed
1	Learners' attitude	Single mode	6.33	2.00	0.12	-0.83	-4.94	0.000
		Dual mode	7.17	2.16	0.11			
		Total	6.80					
2	Tutors' attitude	Single mode	11.22	3.03	0.18	0.01	0.05	0.958
		Dual mode	11.20	3.24	0.17			
		Total	11.21					
3	Tutors' command	Single mode	16.01	4.49	0.27	-2.60	-7.09	0.000
		Dual mode	18.61	4.59	0.24			
		Total	17.46					
4	Role of Institution	Single mode	13.67	3.18	0.19	-2.76	-11.81	0.000
		Dual mode	16.44	2.51	0.13			
		Total	15.22					

Subject wise comparison

Table 6 shows results regarding the subject wise comparison regarding learner attitude, tutors attitude, tutor command and role of institution about assessment of assignments. According to data, a significant mean difference is evident regarding all aspects except the tutor's attitude. Mean scores of teacher education courses is weaker than all regarding learner attitude, tutor command and role of organization. This explores that assignment assessment in the subjects regarding teacher education (MA Education and M. Ed.) needs more attention for improvement in single as well as dual mode institutions.

Table 6*Subject wise mean comparison regarding aspects related to assignment assessment*

Sr. no	Aspects	Subjects	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	F	Sig.
1	Learners' attitude	M.A. (Edu. /M.Ed.)	6.43	2.03	0.14	4.49	.012
		M.A. (English)	7.00	2.07	0.12		
		M.Sc. (Math)	6.94	2.31	0.18		
		Total	6.80	2.13	0.08		
2	Tutors' attitude	M.A. (Edu. /M.Ed.)	11.11	3.10	0.21	1.90	.150
		M.A. (English)	11.47	3.30	0.20		
		M.Sc. (Math)	10.87	2.88	0.23		
		Total	11.21	3.14	0.12		
3	Tutors' command	M.A. (Edu. /M.Ed.)	16.21	4.69	0.33	10.66	.000
		M.A. (English)	18.05	4.76	0.28		
		M.Sc. (Math)	18.06	4.41	0.35		
		Total	17.46	4.73	0.18		
4	Role of Institution	M.A. (Edu. /M.Ed.)	14.26	3.26	0.23	19.18	.000
		M.A. (English)	15.35	3.16	0.19		
		M.Sc. (Math)	16.27	2.52	0.20		
		Total	15.22	3.14	0.12		

Discussion

This paper has evaluated assessment process of assignments in distance learning in single versus dual mode institutions in Pakistan. Evaluation of role of distance learner, tutor, institution and tutors' skill to evaluate the assignments were sub sections for analysis in this study.

In relation to first component evaluated by this study "role of distance learners" an irresponsible attitude of learners have expressed by this study. It has concluded that distance learners take assignments not important to fulfill the requirement of distance learning mode. They thought that assignment preparation and submission is not important for them. Probably, institutions are responsible for the promotion of this wrong perception among learners. If, institutions efficiently monitor schedule of assignments' submission by learners and take appropriate action against those who do not submit assignments timely, students can change their point of view. They can understand that unless attempting the assignments well and submitting them according to pre-decided schedule, institutions can never allow them to continue the course.

Regarding the second and third component evaluated by this study “role of tutors and tutors’ skill” negative attitudes of tutors have explored. This study has supported the view that tutors are main source of developing irresponsible attitudes among distance learners regarding the weak performance in preparation of assignments. It is a reality that learners are best observers about their educators. When students observe that; tutors are not serious to motivate students to work hard. They do not mark assignments effectively. They neither read answers carefully nor point out performance of student. Then assignment preparation becomes an insignificant task near to students.

Regarding the art of tutors to mark assignments, this study has explored that tutors are not trained to teach in distance learning. They are not aware about ways to comment on assignments to open the deficiencies of learners and give direction to correct information. They do not reject plagiarized work of students and even not consider important to send back marked assignments to students. Therefore, students search a way of relaxation for them. They take assignment preparation just a condition to fill in the record of institution regarding assignment submission. They know that plagiarism of assignments will not be checked by the tutors. Therefore, taking pain for preparation of quality assignment and produce original work is a source of wastage of time and energy near to students.

Regarding the role of institutions, this study has explored that institutions do not monitor marking evaluation accurately. No doubt, authorities evaluate accuracy of marks given to students in assignments. But, students though that marks in assignments neither match with accurate effort of learners for writing assignments nor correlate with marks in examinations. A major negligence of authorities is that rule to not appear in examinations until submitting quality assignments by students is not observed properly. Institutions also not distribute assignment preparation and evaluation guides to learners and tutors. This makes the task of assignment evaluation difficult for evaluators.

On the whole, assignment evaluation in single mode institutions and teacher education courses where part time tutors are hired from outside the institution has more defects. This calls attention of organizers to evaluate policies for appointment of tutors and monitoring process of authorities to search reasons behind the situation.

On the whole, comparison of results of this study with previous researches indicates similarity of outcomes with the points raised by Shah (2004); Murphy (2007); Afridi (2008); Iqbal (2011); Jumani et.al. (2011) and Akhter (2014). This calls organizers to observe and implement the rules properly and train tutors to evaluate the assignments seriously. Trainers need to train tutors to understand value and theme of assignment component in distance learning. They need to train tutors about the technique of writing comments of different types and provide supportive feedback on assignments to support learners.

Conclusion

Assignment evaluation process of distance learners of all subjects in single as well as dual mode institutions is not up to the standard but, dual mode institutions are better organizing the assessment process of distance learners. Students of teacher education courses have most weak attitude towards assignments. Tutors appointed for teacher education courses have weaker skill to evaluate assignments of distance learners. Organizers in the area of teacher education courses are taking less pain to monitor and well manage the assessment process of assignments of distance learners.

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