

FROM ACCESS TO SUPPORT: HOW INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT SHAPES STUDENT ENROLLMENT INTENTIONS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION: EVIDENCE FROM AIOU REGIONAL CENTER KOHAT

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Abstract

While distance education has greatly expanded access to higher education, access does not guarantee a student's desire to enroll and stay engaged with a higher education institution. In distance-learning settings, institutional support (administrative guidance, timely communication, complaint resolution, and academic assistance) can affect the students' view of the reliability of the institution and affect their enrollment. The present study focused on the influence of institutional support on student's enrolment in distance learning education by taking a particular reference of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Regional Center Kohat, Pakistan. The study used a quantitative research design and data were gathered from 200 Distance Learning Students by a structured questionnaire. The institutional support was assessed by students' perceptions of administrative assistance, provision of information, communication, handling of complaints, and institutional responsiveness. The relationships between institutional support and enrollment intention were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis. The results showed that the students' perception regarding institutional support was moderate and the institutional support showed a strong positive correlation with the enrollment intention. Furthermore, among the institutional factors analyzed in the overall study, institutional support proved to be the highest predictor of enrollment intention. The results indicate that although affordability and flexibility continue to be strong drawbacks of distance education, the quality and responsiveness of the institutional service are now also becoming key factors in students' enrollment choices. The study proposes that distance education institutions need to shift away from an access-oriented approach to a support-oriented approach to enrollment, focusing not only on administrative responsiveness to students, but also on students' communication, academic guidance, and effective complaint handling as integral parts of the strategic process of enrolling students. The study enriches the already available literature on student support in distance education in Pakistan.

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1. Introduction

Distance Education has created a new paradigm for Higher Education in which students can obtain academic qualifications without having to be physically present on campus. Because of its flexibility, it is especially pertinent to those who are unable to attend university for

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traditional courses, such as those who are working, have family commitments, live far away, lack funds or other personal reasons. This model is especially relevant in Pakistan, where many are still faced with obstacles to accessing traditional higher education. The Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) was established in 1974 with the specific purpose of achieving wider access to education for those who were unable to go to traditional education institutions for various reasons, including work or residence. The university has subsequently built up a wide regional network and continues to be a strong contributor to open and distance learning in the nation.

However, the challenge of enrolling has evolved with increased access. The initial debate in the foundational era of distance education was whether or not education could be made available geographically and financially. The question for contemporary distance education is more complicated: What makes distance-learning students select and trust an institution of distance learning when they have several options for education? As online and technology-assisted learning has grown in popularity, student expectations and options in educational institutions have risen in the areas of communication, academic support, technology, and responsiveness. Accordingly, as students grow more sophisticated in their expectations of the college environment, institutional support has steadily risen to a more central part of the student's experience.

This is especially relevant in distance education where the student is physically removed from the institution, teachers and often other students. In traditional education the student may be able to clear administrative and academic problems in the classroom. For distance learners, however, the institutional communication channels, tutors, regional centers, and online learning platforms, as well as phone services and other means of assistance, may be extremely vital. The time lag that information may take to arrive at students or time that may be needed to resolve an administrative issue may therefore have a larger impact on a distance learner than a student in a traditional classroom setting.

This is supported by recent evidence of the importance of institutional support in digitally mediated higher education. Alwerthan (2025) explored the relationship between institutional support and student engagement in e-learning among 752 university students and further revealed that time efficiency is a mediator between institutional support and student engagement in e-learning. The finding is significant because institutional support is not just an administrative matter, but can affect the effectiveness of online learning.

Further justification for considering institutional support can be drawn from the context of distance learning in Pakistan. Tufail's research on 518 distance learning and online learners focused on institutional support as it related to tutor characteristics, academic competency support, instructional use of technology and teaching practices. A study by Tufail, related to this one, also examined the connection between the students' learning needs, institutional support and the assessment experiences, with response data from 518 distance learners. The relevance of institutional support in the distance-learning experience of Pakistan is already acknowledged in these studies. But there is a significant gap, namely that less focus has been paid to institutional support as a factor that influences students' willingness or intention to enroll.

This is of both theoretical and practical significance. While student satisfaction, engagement, academic achievement, and retention have been the focus of much research in the area of

distance education, enrollment is frequently viewed only as a consequence of affordability, availability, and/or program availability. But the entry into enrolment is also entry into a relationship with an institution. Implicitly students ask whether the school will give them enough information, solve their problem, navigate them through the school administrative process, and help them in the entire school journey. Institutional support can thus be described as an institutional trust-building mechanism at the point of enrolment.

This reasoning has become more significant since the advent of online and distance education, which is becoming increasingly technologically sophisticated. As the world of learning today evolves, contemporary learners are able to interact with institutions via digital platforms, learning-management systems, messaging, online admission systems, and virtual academic environments. A 2025 study revealed that the interconnectedness between online-learning readiness, attitudes, and engagement underscores the significance of students' readiness and institutional environments in influencing online-learning experiences. Concurrently, recent studies on student support in online learning environments highlight the importance of identifying the potential obstacles to effective student support, especially when institutional systems are not able to meet the needs of students.

The question is particularly pertinent with open universities as the object of their educational activity is to educate learners who are unable to attend conventional higher education. One of AIOU's institutional goals is to offer educational opportunities to those who are unable to travel to and from the classroom or work, including students in geographic and socially disadvantaged communities. But the successful implementation of this access mission requires not only that the door is open to the student in order to get him or her into the institution, but also that the student has a responsive institutional environment when he or she arrives at the door.

This represents an important shift in concept:

Access may be the factor that draws the student to the distance education program, while support may be the factor that makes the student stay in the program.

This way, institutional support can be viewed in a few closely related aspects. The first type of administrative support relates to the accessibility and reliability of data on admission, registration, examinations, assignments and other institutional processes. Second, communication support is about the effectiveness and timeliness of communication with students. Thirdly, problem-resolution support is the capacity of the institution to address complaints and problems. Fourth, academic support issues are related to access to tutors and guidance for students with academic-related problems. These dimensions can influence students' perceptions of institutional reliability when combined.

The present study is a case study on AIOU Regional Center Kohat. The significance of the regional-center context is noteworthy because regional centers can be seen as a key interface between a large distance-learning institution and its geographically dispersed student body. Institutional support, therefore, can influence students' experiences not just in the main university but also in the services offered on the regional level.

One of the research gaps identified in the literature is the study of institutional support as a factor that relates to the intention to enroll instead of just as an element of satisfaction, engagement or academic success. This emphasis is important because it will become increasingly necessary for institutions to know what factors are driving students to enroll in

distance courses as well as the factors that make it feel like the institution is a credible and supportive educational option.

1.1 Problem Statement

Though distance education is accessible, affordable, and flexible, it can be challenging for institutions to recruit and retain students. Although AIOU offers education to a wide variety of people, students may face administrative, language, lack of academic support, and service delivery challenges. These experiences can shape the students' views of the school and ultimately impact their decision to enroll or advocate on behalf of the school.

The previous studies in Pakistan have focused on institutional support for learning process, assessment experience and academic needs. In contrast, however, comparatively little empirical research has focussed on whether institutional support has an effect on enrollment intention in a regional open-university environment. Institutional support is therefore the intention of this study to determine the factors affecting the intention of enrollment of students associated with AIOU Regional Center Kohat.

1.2 Research Objective

The present research paper addresses one objective from the broader thesis:

To examine the influence of institutional support on students' enrollment intentions in distance education at AIOU Regional Center Kohat.

1.3 Research Question

The study addresses the following research question:

To what extent does institutional support influence students' enrollment intentions in distance education at AIOU Regional Center Kohat?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study has three significance.

First, it takes the conversation about institutional support from student engagement and learning outcomes and brings it into the realm of enrollment intention, from a theoretical perspective. New studies have shown that institutional support has an effect on the engagement with e-learning, but the choice to enrol has yet to be explored.

Second, the study adds to the empirical evidence from the context of Pakistan, which has a largely diverse and large population of ODE learners. Existing studies in Pakistan have shown the significance of institutional support for distance learners but there is an urgent need to link support with decisions related to distance learner enrolment.

Thirdly, practically, the findings can help the administrators of AIOU and management of regional centers to determine the areas of AIOU support which need improvement. Institutional services can be more than just functions if students feel the institution is responsive, accessible and supportive.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This research design was adopted in the study to investigate the effect of institutional support on the enrolment intention of students in distance education, a quantitative and cross-sectional approach. The study was carried out in Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Regional Center Kohat.

2.2. Population and Sample

Students were the population of the study who were affiliated with AIOU Regional Centre Kohat. The number of the samples taken was 200 students and the sampling technique used was convenience/purposive sampling. The respondents were chosen from among those who were available and had experience in AIOU's distance-learning services.

2.3. Research Instrument

Data gathering was done using a structured questionnaire, which is prepared according to the objective of the study and literature review. Institutional support and intention to enrol were the two major variables measured in the questionnaire. The responses were made on a five-point Likert scale, which is from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

2.4. Variables

Support from institutions was received in the areas of administrative support, information, communication, staff responsiveness, processing complaints, and student assistance. The intention of enrollment was the measurement of the students' willingness to choose and persist with and recommend AIOU as a distance learning institution.

2.5. Validity and Reliability

Questionnaire was checked against content validity to check out the appropriateness of the items in relation to the study variables. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine internal consistency. The institutional support scale had good reliability ($\alpha = .89$) and the enrollment intention scale also had good reliability ($\alpha = .86$).

2.6. Data Collection

The structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the students of the Regional Center. It was voluntary and respondents were informed of the academic purpose of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents were maintained.

2.7. Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed in SPSS. Data were summarized using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Pearson's correlation was used to analyse the relationship between institutional support and intention to enrol, while simple

linear regression was used to explain the predictive effect of institutional support on the intention to enrol. The criterion for determining statistical significance was $p < .05$.

2.8. Ethical Considerations

Participants volunteered to participate and the information of respondents were kept confidential. The data was only used for research purposes and the participants were notified that they are free to participate or not without any force.

3. Results

3.1 Respondents' Perceptions of Institutional Support

The first stage of analysis examined students' perceptions of institutional support at AIOU Regional Center Kohat. Institutional support was assessed through items related to administrative guidance, availability of information, responsiveness of staff, communication, complaint resolution, and overall student assistance.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Institutional Support

Institutional Support Dimension	M	SD
Administrative guidance	3.27	0.89
Information about admission procedures	3.35	0.86
Assistance with registration and administrative matters	3.21	0.91
Responsiveness to student inquiries	3.08	0.94
Complaint resolution	2.98	0.97
Timely communication of important information	3.17	0.88
Overall institutional support	3.18	0.86

Note. $N = 200$. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Interpretation

As shown in Table 1, students reported a moderate overall perception of institutional support ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.86$). Among the individual dimensions, information about admission procedures received the highest mean ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.86$), followed by administrative guidance ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.89$). In contrast, complaint resolution received the lowest mean ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.97$), followed by responsiveness to student inquiries ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.94$).

These results indicate that students generally perceived the institution as providing basic administrative assistance, but they were less satisfied with the speed and effectiveness of institutional responses to their problems. The relatively larger standard deviations for

complaint resolution and responsiveness also suggest greater variation in students' experiences. Overall, the findings indicate that institutional support represents an important area for institutional improvement.

3.2 Students' Enrollment Intention

Enrollment intention was measured through students' willingness to continue with AIOU, recommend the university to others, and perceive the institution as an appropriate choice for distance education.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Enrollment Intention

Enrollment Intention Item	M	SD
Willingness to continue education through AIOU	3.74	0.83
Willingness to recommend AIOU to other students	3.61	0.88
AIOU is a suitable option for flexible higher education	3.89	0.76
Improved institutional services would encourage enrollment	3.96	0.79
Overall enrollment intention	3.80	0.82

Note. $N = 200$. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Interpretation

Table 2 demonstrates that respondents reported a relatively positive level of enrollment intention ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.82$). The highest mean was recorded for the statement that improvements in institutional services would encourage enrollment ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.79$). Similarly, students strongly perceived AIOU as a suitable option for flexible higher education ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.76$).

These results suggest that students recognize the value of AIOU as a flexible educational institution but also believe that better institutional services could further strengthen enrollment. This finding is particularly relevant to the central argument of the study because it suggests that institutional support is not merely an administrative concern but may influence students' decisions regarding enrollment.

3.3 Reliability Analysis

Before examining the relationship between institutional support and enrollment intention, the internal consistency of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

Table 3

Reliability Analysis of the Study Variables

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Institutional support	7	.89
Enrollment intention	4	.86
Overall scale	11	.91

Note. $N = 200$.

Interpretation

As presented in Table 3, the institutional-support scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .89. The enrollment-intention scale also demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .86$). The overall reliability coefficient was .91, indicating a high degree of internal consistency among the items.

According to commonly accepted psychometric standards, coefficients above .70 indicate acceptable internal consistency. Therefore, the results suggest that the items used to measure institutional support and enrollment intention were sufficiently consistent for subsequent statistical analysis.

3.4 Relationship Between Institutional Support and Enrollment Intention

Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to determine whether students' perceptions of institutional support were associated with their enrollment intentions.

Table 4

Correlation Between Institutional Support and Enrollment Intention

Variable	1	2
1. Institutional support	—	
2. Enrollment intention	.59*	—

Note. $N = 200$. ** $p < .001$.

Interpretation

As shown in Table 4, institutional support was positively and significantly correlated with enrollment intention, $r = .59$, $p < .001$. The magnitude of the correlation indicates a moderate-to-strong positive association between the two variables.

This finding suggests that students who perceive AIOU as more supportive, responsive, and accessible are also more likely to report stronger enrollment intentions. Conversely, weaker perceptions of institutional support are associated with lower enrollment intention.

The result provides initial empirical support for the proposition that institutional support is an important factor in students' enrollment decisions.

3.5 Predictive Effect of Institutional Support on Enrollment Intention

To further examine the relationship, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted with institutional support as the predictor and enrollment intention as the dependent variable.

Table 5

Simple Linear Regression Predicting Enrollment Intention From Institutional Support

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	1.92	0.25	—	7.68	< .001
Institutional support	0.59	0.07	.59	8.43	< .001
Model Statistics				Value	
R				.59	
R ²				.35	
Adjusted R ²				.34	
F				71.06	
P				< .001	

Note. $N = 200$. Dependent variable = enrollment intention.

Interpretation

The regression analysis presented in Table 5 indicates that institutional support significantly predicted enrollment intention, $\beta = .59$, $p < .001$. The model produced an R value of .59 and an R^2 value of .35, indicating that institutional support explained approximately 35% of the variance in students' enrollment intention.

The regression coefficient was positive, demonstrating that an improvement in perceived institutional support was associated with an increase in enrollment intention. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 198) = 71.06$, $p < .001$.

The findings therefore provide strong evidence that institutional support is an important predictor of students' enrollment intentions in distance education.

3.6 Summary of the Main Quantitative Findings

Table 6

Summary of Major Statistical Findings

Analysis	Result	Interpretation
Institutional support	$M = 3.18, SD = 0.86$	Moderate perceived support
Enrollment intention	$M = 3.80, SD = 0.82$	Relatively positive intention
Reliability: institutional support	$\alpha = .89$	High internal consistency
Reliability: enrollment intention	$\alpha = .86$	Good internal consistency
Correlation	$r = .59, p < .001$	Significant positive relationship
Regression	$\beta = .59, p < .001$	Significant positive predictor
Explained variance	$R^2 = .35$	35% of variance explained

Interpretation

Overall, the quantitative findings consistently support the central proposition of the study. Students' perceptions of institutional support were moderate, while their enrollment intentions were relatively positive. Most importantly, institutional support demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship with enrollment intention and emerged as a significant predictor of the dependent variable.

4. Discussion

Results of the study reveal that institution support is one of the factors affecting the intention of students to enroll in distance education. Students' institutional support was moderate and their overall intention of enrolling was relatively positive. The positive relationship between institutional support and enrollment intention ($r = .59; p < .001$), along with a significant regression coefficient ($\beta = .59; p < .001$) suggests that students' perceptions of greater institutional support are significantly associated with their stronger intentions to enroll and/or persist in distance education. The results align with Alwerthan (2025) who concluded that institutional support had a significant relationship with student engagement in e-learning and Khong et al. (2024) who found that perceived institutional support was one of the factors that had a significant relationship with the satisfaction of online learning for students. Similarly, Pitsoane (2024) highlighted the role of institutional support personnel in assisting distance and online learners in the adaptation and development in an open distance learning system, and Tufail (2024a) noticed that institutional support plays a crucial role in the learning experiences of distance and online learners. Tufail (2024b) also found the significance of institutional support to students' learning needs and assessment experience.

The ratings for complaint resolution and responsiveness to student enquiries were lower than the other ratings and suggest that whilst institutional services may be there, students also expect them to be responsive, timely, and effective. The problem is especially relevant in distance learning where students are not physically present in the institution and often rely on electronic communication, tutors, regional centers and other learning support systems in the distance. More recently, there are signs that responsive institutional structures are relevant to education through technology. Aad et al (2024) identified institutional support as a facilitator for online teaching and learning, while Pitsoane (2024) identified the role of support personnel

as a facilitator for successful progress of distance learners. The results of Tufail (2024a) are also applicable since they have revealed that students' perceptions of institutional support include several aspects of the distance learning process, not just one administrative service.

The overall results indicate that accessibility might not be enough to draw students to distance education in the future. While flexibility, accessibility and affordability remain key benefits of AIOU, the quality of institutional support can impact the confidence of students in selecting an AIOU institution. These findings, therefore, build on the previous studies and provide a link between institutional support and yet another indicator of students' engagement and satisfaction with the institution (Alwerthan, 2025; Khong et al., 2024); and the students' learning experiences (Tufail, 2024a, 2024b), and the students' enrollment intentions. This may enhance the perception of the reliability of AIOU Regional Center Kohat and promote higher enrollment intentions by improving communication, complaint resolution, administrative responsiveness and academic guidance for AIOU Regional Center Kohat students. In this context, institutional support is not only an administrative responsibility, but a part of the strategic process of student recruitment, engagement and retention.

Major findings, conclusion and recommendations 5.

5.1 Major Findings

The study investigated that how the institutional support affects the students' intention to enroll in distance education in special reference to AIOU Regional Center Kohat. The main findings are presented below.

A moderate level of institutional support was reported by students, which suggested that the level of support for students was not satisfactory in overall support systems even though essential administrative and informational support was provided.

Institutional support information on admission procedures and administrative guidance was received relatively favorably, indicating that generally students had low-level institutional information.

Students reported more difficulties with complaint resolution and/or in response to their questions, which were comparatively rated at lower levels.

The overall impression of the students about enrolment intent was relatively positive and AIOU is still seen as good alternative for flexible higher education.

- An improvement in institutional services was also found as a factor which could further increase students' willingness to enrol suggesting that institutional support is a potential enrolment factor.

There was a significant positive correlation between institutional support and intention to enroll ($r = .59$, $p < .001$). This suggests that students who had a more positive perception of institutional support were more likely to make a positive report on their enrolment intentions.

Results of regression analysis showed that institutional support was significantly related to intention to enrol ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$).

The enrollment intention was found to be significantly explained by the institutional support which accounted for about 35% of the variance ($R^2 = .35$), implying that the contribution of institutional support is substantial to students' decisions for enrollment.

The overall results indicate that institutional responsiveness is not only an administrative matter but it can be a significant strategic consideration to attract and retain learners in distance education.

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study suggests that institutional support is an important factor in influencing students' enrollment intentions in distance education. The findings show that whilst being accessible, open and flexible are basic characteristics of open and distance education, they must also be supported by effective institutions.

The positive correlation between institutional support and intention to enroll suggests that institutional attitudes towards students' academic and administrative concerns have a positive impact on their enrollment intentions. The strong positive relationship between institutional support and intention to enroll shows that when a student thinks a school is responsive, informative, accessible and able to address the students' academic and administrative concerns, the student is more likely to express positive intentions towards enrollment. This conclusion is further reinforced by the regression results, which show that institutional support explained a significant amount of variation in intention to enroll.

A key finding of the study is that simply giving access to education is not enough. Today's distance students will demand that institutions be responsive, that information be communicated in a timely fashion, and that complaints be addressed effectively, and that academic and administrative resources be made available. Therefore, institutional support is not to be seen as a secondary administrative role, but part and parcel of the student experience.

The perception of complaint resolution and responsiveness is relatively low which indicates that there is a need to improve the support system for AIOU Regional Center Kohat. Investing in these areas can boost student confidence in the institution and can help foster greater intentions to enroll.

Consequently, the study suggests that AIOU can consolidate its position in the field of distance education when it is shifting from access-based approach to support-based approach that

caters for students. This would be a model that leverages the best elements of DL—flexibility, accessibility, and cost-effectiveness, and also incorporates responsive institutional services.

The results indicate that:

Access can be a motivator for students to enrol in distance education but enabling institutional support can help provide students with confidence in their decision to take and stay engaged in the institution.

5.3 Recommendations

The recommendations are directly based on the main findings of the study.

Strengthen institutional responsiveness

It appears that AIOU Regional Center Kohat needs to create more efficient ways to answer students' questions and requests as they showed less satisfaction regarding responsiveness to inquiries. Students' perceptions of institutional support can be enhanced by the availability of clear response procedures, communication channels and reasonable response-time standards.

Improve complaint-resolution mechanisms

The Regional Center's analysis concluded that one of the areas that received the lower scores, complaint resolution, should have a systematic process for managing and tracking complaints. Students should have a straightforward way to make a complaint, be able to track the complaint and receive timely updates on its status and resolution. This might help to minimize uncertainty and increase confidence of students in the institution.

Enhance student communication

Distance learning is based on the principle of communication; so it is recommended to enhance the regular, clear and timely communication between AIOU and Students. Such information as admission, registration, examinations, assignments, deadlines, and academic procedures should be conveyed via a variety of accessible mechanisms.

Develop a student-centered support system

Student support should not be viewed as an administrative task only and should be treated as a strategic institutional priority because institutional support was found to have a significant impact on the intention to enroll. The services provided in the regional center should be based on students needs and challenges.

Improve school academic and administrative support

Students should be provided with very clear information on admission, registration, school procedures, assignments, examinations and other institutional requirements which are readily

accessible. Increased coordination among regional-centre staff and tutors might also help to minimize the confusion distance learners may currently experience.

Use institutional support as an enrollment strategy

Institutional support accounted for a large share of the variation in the intention to enrol, so AIOU should include the quality of the support provided to students in its enrolment and outreach strategy. The university should be made aware to the prospective students not only about the affordability and flexibility of the university but also about the support which will be provided to them.

Introduce student systematic feedback.

Student feedback about the administrative services, communication, academic guidance, and complaint resolution should be taken by AIOU Regional Center Kohat regularly. The results should be checked regularly and if problems are recurring, they should be tackled.

Strengthen digital support services.Enhance digital support services.

Distance education has increasingly become dependent on digital communication and online channels should be enhanced for students' assistance in AIOU. A centralized digital helpdesk, often asked questions, online complaint submission and ready-to-use information resources might make it easier for those students who are not able to make it to the Regional Center regularly.

Train support personnel

Staff needs to be trained regularly in communication skills, student facilitation, problem solving, and digital support services as the quality of institutional support is very dependent on the interaction between students and institutional staff. Better interactions with the staff might directly influence students' perceptions of quality of the institution.

Monitor enrollment-related effects

Last but not least, AIOU should review its institutional support periodically to ensure that any improvements in institutional support are matched by improvements in enrollment, student satisfaction and retention. This type of monitoring would enable the institution to identify the support intervention(s) that yields the most positive results.

5.4 Overall Recommendation

The conclusion is one general recommendation:

Institutional support for AIOU should be targeted at making it a strategic part of the student-enrollment and retention policy.

Making the institution more responsive, better at communicating, resolving complaints, providing academic advice, and supporting online, would not only help students' current issues, but also make the school more appealing to prospective students. This would enable AIOU to retain its heritage of accessibility, affordability and flexibility, and develop a more responsive and student-centered distance-education experience.

5.5. Implications of AIOU Regional Center Kohat

The results are directly applicable to the AIOU Regional Center Kohat. There was also a clear indication that institutional support was a key factor in influencing students' intentions to enrol, so improving students' services should not be seen as purely an administrative matter. Instead, they should be considered part of the Regional Center's enrollment strategy.

The relatively poorer outcomes for complaint resolution and responsiveness provide some focus on work to improve in specific areas that have practical value. The Regional Centre might, therefore, be reinforced:

- 1 how long it takes to get back to students' questions;
- 2 complaint-tracking mechanisms;
- 3 information on the admission and registration process;
- 4 communication of exam/academic information;
- 5 referrals to other support services; and
- 6 Co-ordination of students, tutors and administrative staff;
- 7 suggestions for improvement, or feedback, by which students can assess the services of an institution.

These could have a positive impact on the experience of current students, and their views of the institution.

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