

CHOICE OF INSTRUCTIONAL MEDIA OF B.ED. STUDENTS OF IGNOU FROM TWO INDIAN METROPOLISES

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ABSTRACT

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) of India uses multiple media and modes for reaching out to its distant learners. For most of the programmes offered to these learners, print is the master medium and other media supplement it. Instructions for the Bachelor in Education (B.Ed.), one of the popular programmes of IGNOU, are also delivered similarly. A survey was undertaken to determine the extent of utilization of instructions provided through various media by the students of B.Ed of two Indian metropolises –Delhi and Kolkata, having high penetration of advanced communication technologies. As the students of B.Ed. happen to be teachers who are supposed to be using ICT for teaching in their schools, the survey aimed to determine whether they were also using ICT for learning. The survey was carried out with a questionnaire with closed and open ended questions. It was found that only print medium was used for learning while the other media of the multimedia package remained mostly unused. The reason for this trend was found to be mainly the perception that the print medium is sufficient for assessment purposes. Suggestions have been made that to utilize the multiple media instructional system, interesting programmes that can hook learners be developed for delivery by electronic media and that gradually ICT may be integrated into the programmes from the present supplementary mode so that complacency in using it is reduced among learners.

Keywords: Distance education; instructions; multiple media; B.Ed. programme; media utilization

INTRODUCTION

The field of education, especially distance education is becoming heavily dependent upon technology for delivering instructions. From the first generation of distance education depending solely on the print medium today distance education has reached the fifth generation involving intelligent flexible learning model. The number of institutions adopting Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been growing (Reddy & Srivastava 2003). ICT is diminishing the distance in distance education. Using information technologies, students can decide about their studies, learning time, place and resources in a better way (Hussain & Safdar 2008). Rather than using technology of only one kind, distance education institutions may use various technologies for delivering instructions. Such an approach involving use of multiple media has been hailed by Peters (2005) as a big thrust forward.

IGNOU too uses multiple media (including print and other mass media) and modes for delivering instructions for its various programmes, including its Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programme. The delivery of instructions for this programme is through print medium supplemented by various others as depicted in Figure: 1.

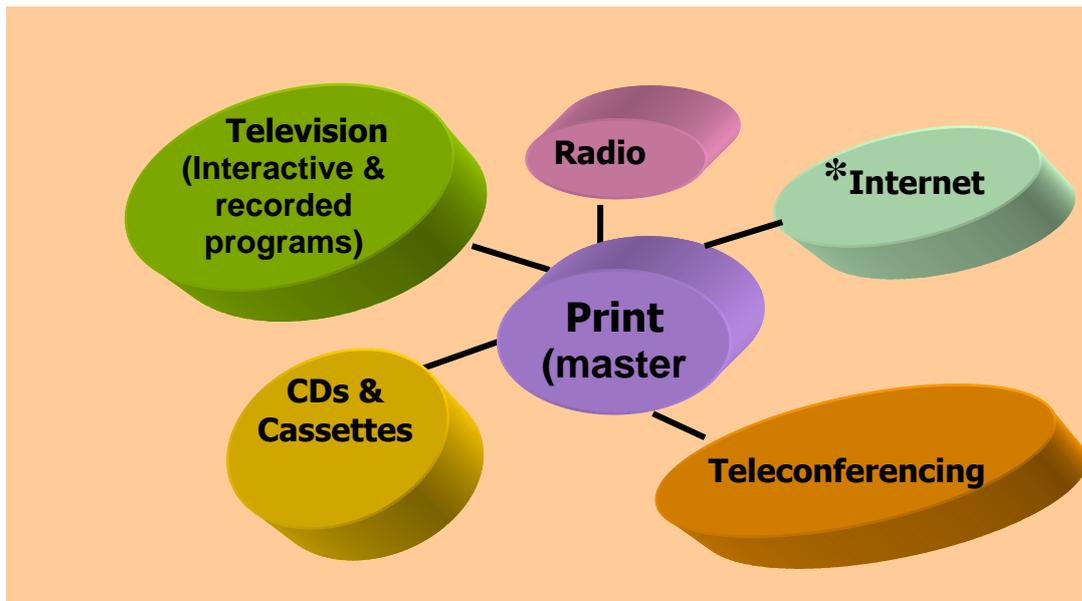


Figure: 1
Technologies supplementing print

*Web based resources available over the Internet include content in text and video formats and web casts. Although multiple media and technologies including advanced ones are used by IGNOU but they usually only supplement the print medium. Technology integration has not been done in view of the heterogeneous learner profile with learners having varying access to technologies. However, IGNOU's B.Ed. students are homogeneous in the respect that they are all teachers in government/private schools recognized by the government and are expected to actively use ICT for teaching and learning.

This is because, since the National Policy on Education (1986) of India stressed the need for educational technology for teaching, several measures have been adopted to ensure the use of ICT in schools. The centrally sponsored schemes 'Computer Literacy and Studies in Schools (CLASS)' in the eighties and thereafter 'ICT in School' launched in December 2004 and the current National Policy on ICT in School Education, 2009 endeavor to optimize the use of ICT in school education.

Hence, school teachers are expected to be habituated in using ICT for teaching and learning. Moreover, access to ICT in Indian metropolises is high.

Kolkata has emerged as the metropolitan city of India with the highest number of students using the internet for information access, as well as with the highest mobile and personal computer penetration among students and Delhi is not far behind (TCS Survey, Domain-b.com). In view of this, the present study was undertaken to ascertain the extent of use of instructions delivered through various media and modes by students of B.Ed., teaching in metropolitan schools.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In view of the benefits of delivering instructions through media other than print, many institutions offering distance education are delivering instructions through different media and modes. Such an instructional strategy takes into account the different learning styles and abilities of the recipients of instruction. Hence, providing instruction through different media types conveys the benefits each medium has on learning (Passerini and Granger, 1999). It also addresses the learners' varying⁸³ access to different technologies. However, there are studies indicating that in –spite of

instructions available in multiple media many students prefer only the print medium, while ignoring the others. A study by Gaskell, Gilmartin & Kelly (2005) indicates that ICT still complements but does not replace print, face to face or telephonic contact. Similar findings have also emerged from a survey undertaken by Islam and Islam (2008). They found that although Bangladesh Open University was using print and other media for imparting education, a significant proportion of the students preferred print medium and the tutorial classes. Skills for using technology for learning may also not guarantee the use of ICT for learning. Olivia (2009) found that distance learners of Ghana have a fair idea of ICT and utilise it to some extent. But even basic ICT applications like email and text message are not being fully utilised in most distant learning endeavours by the learners.

Some studies have been undertaken to ascertain the utilization of instructions provided by various media by students of IGNOU. Kumar, Kaushik & Chander (2005) have reported the lesser use of media other than print due to low awareness about the various channels through which instructions were provided. The study conducted by Srivastava & Reddi (2007) reinforced this finding. On investigating the study habits of successful distance learners of IGNOU and the strategies adopted for learning, media utilized, and modes of support preferred by students, they found that none of the students preferred to adopt any innovations in their learning process, not even the technological interventions provided by IGNOU. These studies indicating non utilization of technology mediated instructions raise questions about the huge investments made by educational institutions in technology.

As said by Suri (2008) there is a recurrent pattern in investment in ICT based initiatives in institutions imparting distant education. Huge amounts are spent on infrastructure for ICT, which eventually remain underutilized. In India a much lesser percentage of the population in the relevant age-group receives tertiary education than that in many developed countries and hence, there is a need for an approach that is not shaped by western models of distance learning and does not shy away from low-tech solutions. It was necessary to determine whether these findings and suggestions apply to the B.Ed. programme of IGNOU too. This is because this programme has a unique target group comprising only in-service teachers, who are supposed to be integrating technology in their classroom teaching.

IGNOU'S B.Ed. PROGRAMME

IGNOU's B.Ed. is a two year teacher training programme for in-service teachers teaching at the secondary level and having at least two years teaching experience. It is offered through the distance mode. The practical component of this programme includes two workshops, one in first and the other in the second year of the programme. Workshops are held in face to face mode at the Programme Study Centers (PSCs) that serve as delivery points for B.Ed. A PSC of IGNOU is a conventional teacher education college. Each PSC is allotted 100 B.Ed. students of IGNOU. Instructions recorded in audio and video cassettes and CDs and television (with video player) and books for the library are provided by IGNOU.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- to determine the media preferred by the students for learning;
- to determine the reasons for such preference;
- to assess the extent of utilization of the instructions provided through different media.

METHOD

The study undertaken was an action research. The sample was from only two metropolises of India- Delhi and Kolkata. A survey was carried out and qualitative data were collected with the help of a questionnaire with closed and open ended questions.

Sample

Data was collected in the months when workshops are organized at PSCs. From a list of the PSCs of each city, four were selected through simple random technique. 30 questionnaires were distributed randomly among the students of each of the two workshops going on in a PSC. Thus in each PSC 60 questionnaires were given. 66% of the questionnaires were received. 58% of the respondents were female. The respondents were in the age group of 26- 54. 73% were graduates and the rest post graduates. 83% of them taught in private schools. Their teaching experience ranged from 3-18 years. 98% of them could use the computer for word processing, making presentations and using the Internet. Only 3% could use spreadsheets.

Tool for Data Collection

A questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions was developed and finalized with the help of the feedback received on it from experts (faculty in IGNOU and B.Ed. PSCs).

Limitation

The study, an action research was limited in scope. The sample was from only two metropolises of India. Hence, the conclusions cannot be generalized.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings regarding the media preferred by learners and the reasons thereof: Learners' awareness: Learners' awareness of instructions available through media supplementing the print medium was as that depicted in Figure 2.

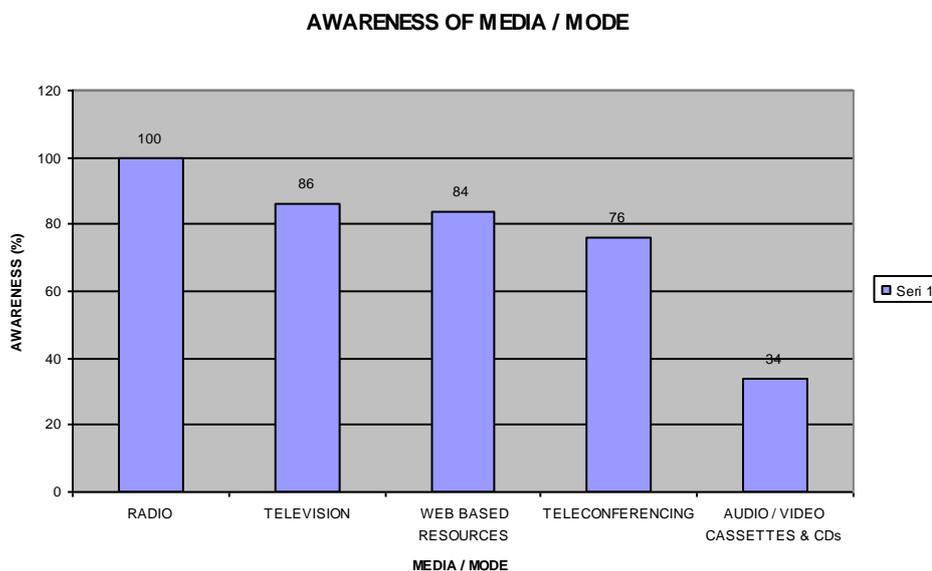


Figure: 2
Awareness of media/modes supplementing print

Learners' access: access to technologies supplementing print medium is depicted through Figure 3.

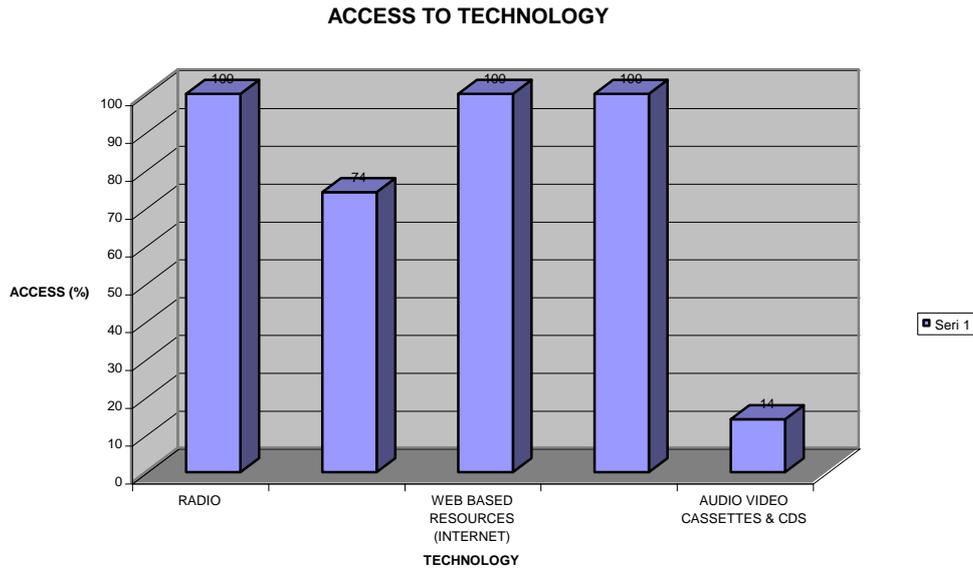


Figure: 3 Access to technology

Access to the Internet was total (but through cyber café as 79% of learners did not have direct access to it). Education through Direct to Home (DTH) television services is reaching millions of Indian homes and cable operators are also supposed to provide IGNOU’s television channels. Still 26% of the learners did not have access as the local cable operators did not include these channels. Teleconferencing could be accessed through PSC/Regional Center/DTH. Access to Cassettes & CDs was possible only through PSCs and was the lowest. Preference of media: Learners preferred the print medium the most and used it the most for learning. The reasons for preferring the print medium the most have been depicted through Figure

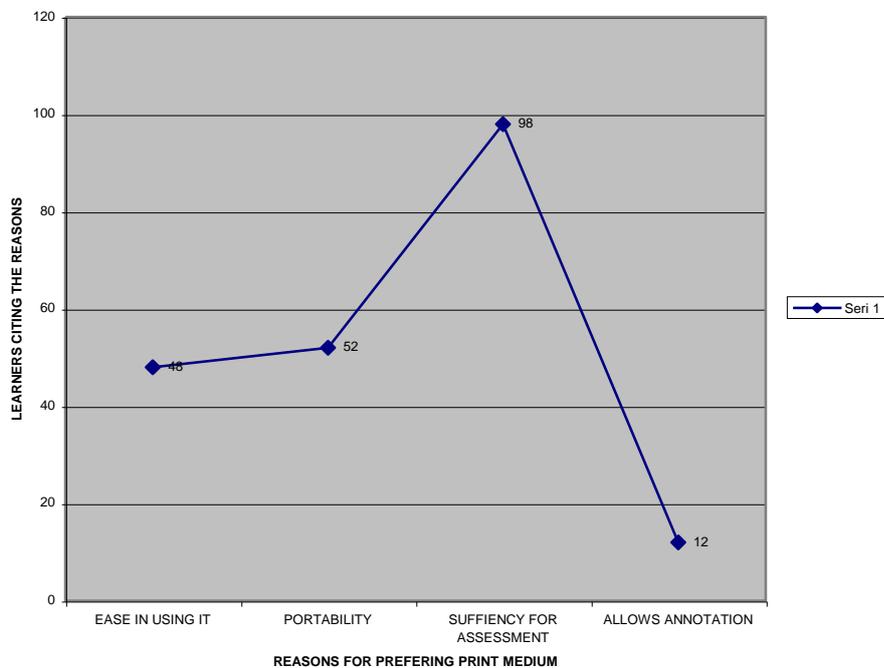


Figure: 4 Reasons for preferring print over other media

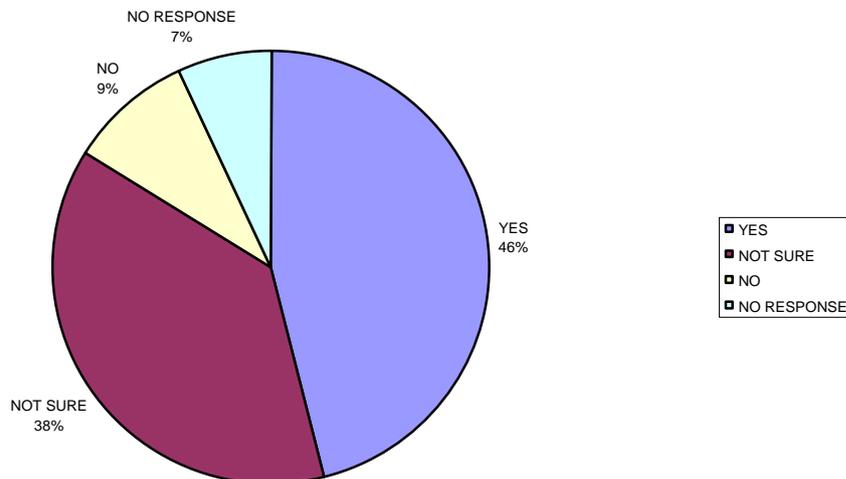
Awareness about the benefits of media other than print: Although the print medium was preferred the most but there was awareness among learners about the benefits that other media could offer (Table: 1).

**Table: 1
Advantages of media supplementing print as stated by learners**

Media supplementing print	Advantages for learners from IGNOU
Radio	Available through cell phone; Interactive programmes;
Internet (Web based resources)	Availability of assignments, question papers of previous examinations, examination schedule, grades obtained and other information, downloadable forms
Television	Accessible from home;
Teleconferencing	Interactive programmes; audio and visuals available
Audio/Video Cassettes & CDs	No response

Shortcomings experienced with the master medium (print): only three shortcomings were mentioned- 94% said that self learning material was not received on time but much later. 86% said that some topics needed elaboration. 12% said that font size needed to be increased.

Potential of the media supplementing the print medium in overcoming the shortcomings of the latter: Less than 50% of the learners were sure of the potential of the media supplementing the print medium in overcoming the shortcomings of the latter (Figure 5).



**Figure: 5
Response to the potential of the media supplementing the print medium in overcoming the shortcomings of the latter**

Findings regarding extent of use of various media by learners and the reasons thereof:

Media (technology) not used regularly by learners and the reasons thereof are tabulated in Table: 2.

Table: 2
Reasons for utilizing /not utilizing different media

Techno-logy	Regular use	Reasons for not utilizing media	Percentage citing the reason
Print	Done	-----	-----
Radio	Not done	Lack of awareness/access	0
		Lack of time	97
		Uninteresting programmes	58
		Not useful for learning	32
Television	Not done	Lack of awareness	14
		Lack of time	81
		Uninteresting programmes	63
		Cable operator not providing channels	36
		Not useful for learning	56
Web based Resources	Not done	Not having awareness of the resources	16
		Lack of time	56
		Not having skills to operate computer	14
		Not having broadband	66
		Not having direct access to ICT	72
		Content uninteresting	61
		Not useful for learning	43
Tele con-ferencing	Not done	Lack of awareness	24
		Content uninteresting	No response
		Lack of time	65
		Distance of reception point from home	63
		Not useful for learning	65
Audio / Video Cassettes/ & CDs	Not done	Lack of awareness/access	66
		Lack of time	22
		Uninteresting programmes	2
		Not useful for learning	68

Although advantages of the media supplementing print were understood by learners (Table: 1), none of these were used regularly.

Access to many technologies like teleconferencing and Internet was high but awareness about their utility as sources of instructions was relatively low. However, even access and awareness together did not ensure utilization of some technologies like radio. Media supplementing print was not considered to be useful for learning by majority of the learners. For cassettes and CDs, number of learners rating the content as not useful was exceeded by that able to access this technology.

This could be due to a general perception that no medium mode other than print are useful for learning.

At the individual level, lack of time and at the institutional level uninteresting programmes emerged as main reasons for not utilizing media supplementing print.

None of the learners had found the printed content uninteresting or lacked time for it.

The learners' use of ICT for teaching was as depicted in Figure: 6.

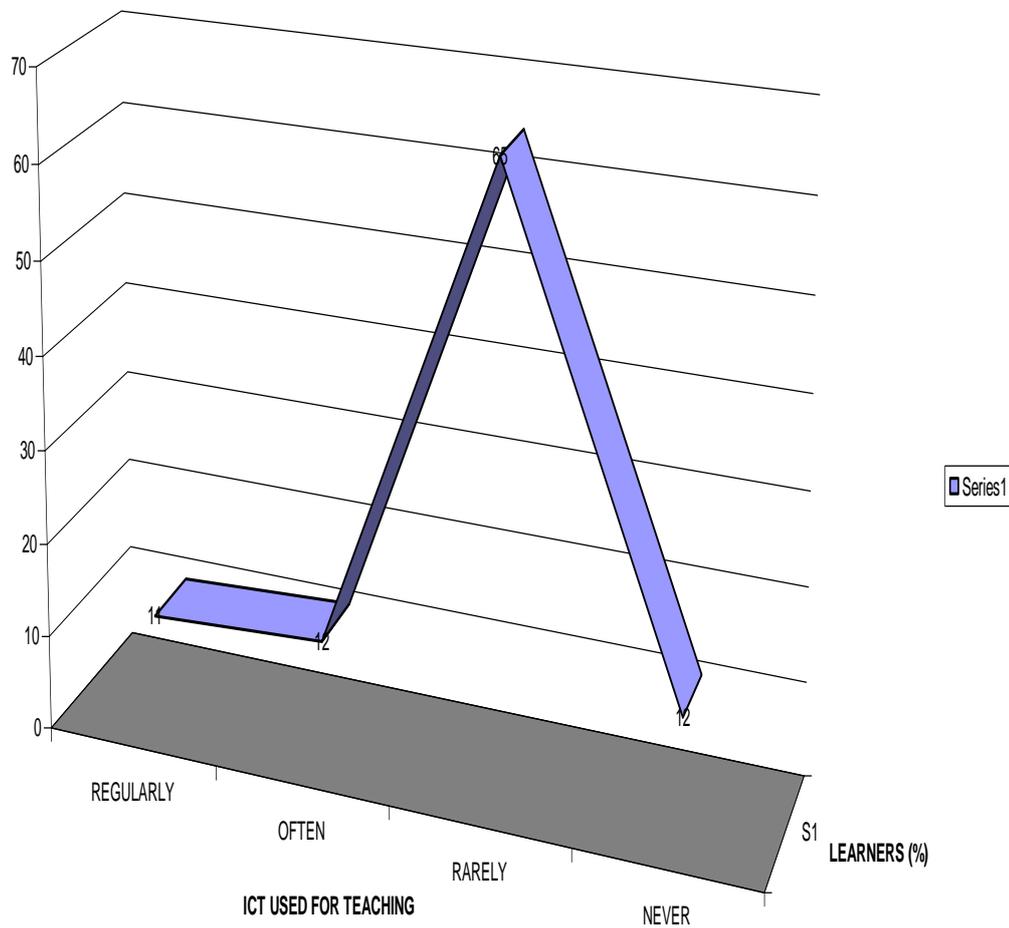


Figure: 6
Use of ICT for teaching

The ways in which ICT was used for teaching has been depicted through Figure: 7.

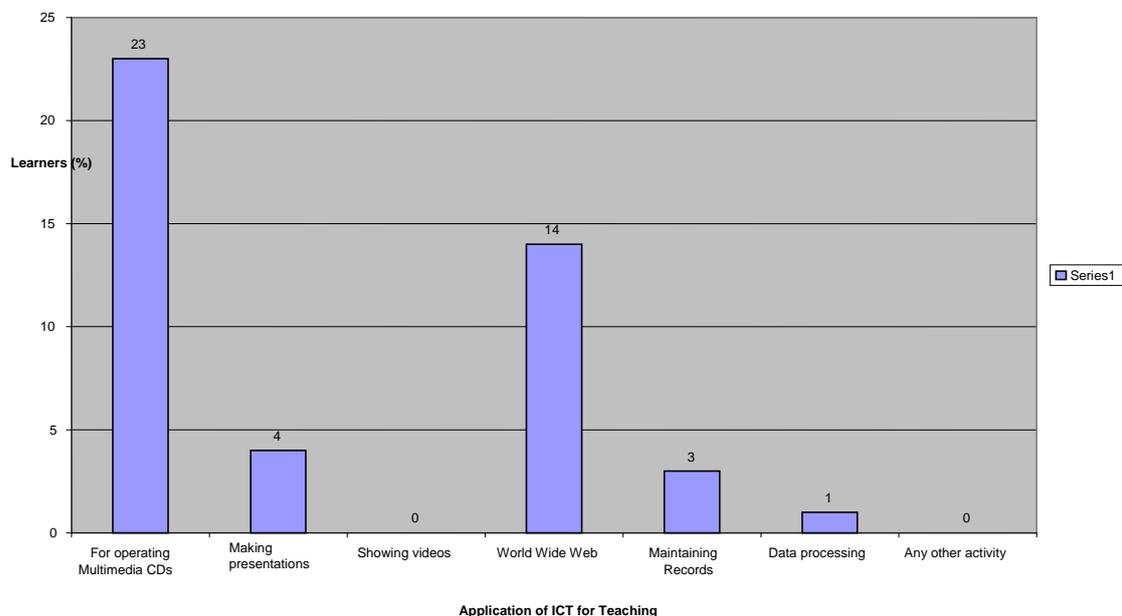


Figure: 7 Application of ICT for teaching

Figures 6 and 7 make it clear that majority of the learners made only sporadic use of technology for teaching and that too with limited purposes. Integration of technology in classroom teaching is yet to be done.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTED COURSE OF ACTION

Even though distance education has reached the fifth generation with interactive flexible learning models and IGNOU provides education through many advanced technologies, the learners are still transfixed in the first generation of distance education, involving study of only printed materials.

Although the learners were teachers and most of them possessed skills to use ICT and also had access to many advanced technologies, yet they did not use technology for teaching and learning. Although the reasons for not using ICT for teaching were not studied but reasons for not using it for learning was found to be that print medium fulfilled the requirements related to assessment.

Hence, there was an overwhelming and absolute dependence on it to the near exclusion of all other media. Even delayed receipt of printed materials had not led to exploration of alternatives, especially the digitized content available online. Uninteresting content added to the problem of non-utilization as the student can quickly become bored and lose attention while watching educational programmes on television (Sharma & Mahapatra, 2006; Islam and Islam, 2008). This shows that technologies if used in isolation from the needs and interests of the learners will not be useful.

As said by Louw & Englebrecht (2005) the success of technology enhanced learner support system depends on the successful alignment and integration of all the role players and functions and investing in ICT infrastructure alone will not produce the desired results. The utilization of only print medium not only limits the learning experiences but also leads to the non-utilization of the institution's inputs in developing and delivering content through various media. Therefore, the following suggestions have been made for better utilization of multiple media by learners:

- There is a need to strengthen the role of the cable operators and PSCs in facilitating access to technologies. There is also a need to increase the penetration of broadband and make direct access to computers/Internet possible. Awareness about the multiple media may be generated during the induction programmes, workshops and academic counseling sessions.
- Since the print medium is sufficient for assessment purposes, it is quite likely that educational broadcasts have to compete with entertainment programmes for the learners' attention. Hence, they need to be interesting.
- The practice of maintaining ICT in the supplementary mode breeds complacency regarding its use. In the 21st century the solution is not in doing away with technology and regressing to the correspondence mode. It may be better to take a step forward and start integrating technology. People in all parts of the country have access to broadcasting media like radio and television. Apart from these, audio, video, computers and cyber cafés have reached all over the country. Therefore with a little extra effort and planning, media can be successfully integrated into the learning process (Bose, 2006). At least those technologies that are today easily accessible to the learners from all over the country like radio and audio/video CDs may be integrated into the strategy of delivering instructions.

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