

# **Linking media use with the Learner's Assessment: An approach for promoting media uses in distance and open learning**

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## ABSTRACT

*The role of media in distance education is well established. Media are channels used for transmission of message, in the form of print, sound and vision. The channels are: printed message, usually on paper or on screen, which can be, writing, graphics or photographs; still pictures, which are transparent for projection or viewing; sounds, as in a live radio broadcast, or recorded as on a sound disk; moving pictures, as in a live television broadcast or recorded on a cine film. Or combination of all the three in the form of multi-media. The information technology has radically opened up new vistas in distance learning. Most of the teaching in distance education is delivered through these devices and, increasingly through a variety of computers based systems. As such the success largely depends on its use in delivery of distance education programmes. If the media available is not used, or under used the objective of distance education gets defeat. But, there is still a considerable low use of the media available to distance learners in India. Some learners don't consider it necessary for their learning pursuits. To others it is viewed only as optional mechanism which requires extra efforts to put in use. Even amongst those open universities that claim to have developed more sophisticated media, hardly any one ensures optimum use of such options. The use of media is in no way linked with the evaluation. Contrarily the emphasis is on the use of single media, i.e. Print media, indirectly, as assessment is totally based on this medium. It is therefor suggested that some kind of weightage needs to be given on this aspect while assessing the learners performance, may be in the form of continuous assessment or terminal exams. These issues have been discussed at length in the present paper.*

## **Introduction:**

Distance education has established its firm roots in the educational scene of India today. It is offered through sixty-four correspondence institutes, nine state open universities, and one national open university. The growth of distance education in recent years has been striking with regard to both the numbers of students undertaking study and the number of

institutions providing distance education About 25% of the total student population in higher education belong to this mode of education. The open universities working in the country are as under:

Indira Gandhi National Open University ( IGNOU)	1985	New Delhi
Dr. BR Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU)	1982	Hyderabad
Kota Open University	1987	Kota
Yashvant Rao Chauvan Maharastra Open University	1989	Nashik
Nalanda Open University	1987	Patna
Bhimrao Ambedkar Open University	1996	Ahemdabad
Karnatak State Open University	1996	Mysore
Netaji Subhash Open University	1997	Kolkutta
Rajshree Tandan UP Open University	1999	Allahabad

Open universities are free to take their own decisions and autonomous with regards to formulating their study programmes; to provide relaxed entry qualifications and full freedom to learners in regards to time, place, and selection of courses; to offer learning packages in the form of high quality course material, supported with the audio-visuals, learning through assignments, problem solving sessions, computer assisted programmes, etc.; and to provide strong support service to learners in solving their administrative and academic problems, while assisting them in the successful completion of their respective programmes. There is also a continual debate on systemization, organization and innovation in various aspects and processes of delivery of distance education.

### **Media Convergence in DE:**

The term 'convergence' refers to the breaking down of barriers between two different entities. Such convergence has been driven by a number of factors, including new mode of knowledge storage and retrieval, the impact of life-long learning policies and the entry of larger than ever numbers of adult part-time students into tertiary education, and the demands of both employers and individuals for professional and work-related education throughout working lives. Besides, open and distance learning, many new concepts are frequently used in higher education now a days, e.g. collaborative learning, self-paced learning, student centered learning, resources based learning, flexible learning. Media has a vital impact in such new methods of education.

Practically speaking, we can see that methods of education have been joined by a great variety of new type of records, materials such as, learning material in the form of specially structured learning material, and less common ones such as micro graphics, video recording, CD-ROMs, computer files print to multiple media: internet sites and so forth. An important development of the impact of information technology is that the group learning is replaced by individualized learning. In fact with the development of information devices like CD-ROM, the availability of multi-media and the Internet, individualized learning has the potential to become the most popular learning process.

Thus, the media approaches are wider, a learner has to select one or more media which may be useful according to his capacity and availability of the media options. As such the selection of appropriate media has become a difficult task for the learners and education providers'.

It is equally important that each medium has unique merits and demerits. We must recognize that every media has its role and place - even in the same institution and to the extent in every course of a programme. Media choice greatly depends on the access, motivation to use, ease in use, skills required, etc.

### **Media Use**

ODL in India has to move towards the maximum use of media for delivery in the new Millennium. The use of media in India or any other developing country is an ideal goal, but in reality it still have a long way to reach this goal. Its use appears to have a great potential in the near future. However, printed materials will still be the basic instructional media in Asia and the Pacific region for the coming years. In the new Millennium it is extremely unlikely that in India ODL will diminish in prominence or popularity in the foreseeable future. In fact, the substantial growth of institutions offering courses through open and distance learning in the last decade indicates that, ODL is enjoying a relatively high status and continue to gain credibility and recognition as a means of providing quality education.

The access to media and their utilization is a prime condition to learn from media. To be relevant and effective, technology has to be accessible to the student population, it should be affordable and user-friendly. However, a number of factors affect media utilization and in turn is learning. To take an example, for participating in a teleconferencing session, the learner has to reach the regional center for which s/he has to travel long distances, make lodging and boarding arrangements. For participating through Gyan Darshan, the channel should be available to the learner on his/her cable network. If it is not available, the local cable operator needs to be pursued to provide the channel who may have his /her own limitations to provide the channel. As regards IRC, the learner may not frequently listen to radio; even if it is used, the will to use it for learning may be missing. Once these conditions are met, the learner has to switch on the radio/television set at the time of broadcast, listen/ watch the broadcast and participate in the session. S/he should reasonably well understand the subject under discussion in order to raise any query. However, s/he may not have access to telephones at that point of time.

A motivated learner, however, can overcome some of these problems, but media utilization constitutes a primary condition to learn from media. Even if a learner does not raise any question /query, the mere exposure to a variety of questions and answers may assist in learning. The study on IRC revealed that in some specific cases, regular exposure to IRC motivated some learners to study and clear their examinations.

According to a study, data reveals that though 81% of sample students aware about the teleconferencing programme, only 32% of students who aware the programme were able to watch the teleconferencing lessons. And 84% of students who watched teleconferencing lessons reveal that the programmes are useful and interesting as they are maintaining high levels of interaction between specialized subject experts and students. However, 68% of students who aware the teleconferencing were not able to watch the programme. The reasons cited by respondents are (i) timings were not suitable for them because they attend classes on Sundays. (ii) teleconferencing facilities were not available at all study centres except a few at district head quarters (iii) the schedule of teleconferencing programmes was not known to majority of students.

The counseling through radio for hard core education is still in experimental stage. A decision for utilizing radio for the educational purposes never came in a serious manner. The experiment is new but the results came in the form of increase in enrolments in the university for various subjects. The broadcast also serves the purpose of career counseling which is the basic and utmost necessity not only youngsters but also who want to upgrade their knowledge and better opportunities for their career. The research study made in 1998 at AIR Bhopal says 'Besides IGNOU students, the students of Raja Bhoj Open University, and general public also listened and participated in the counseling sessions. The need is to strengthen the system and should try to reach on local basis in the local and regional languages too.

A constant pursuance after the broadcast can bring useful results in helping the students and the masses... A constant feedback system will be useful. This experiment is an example for setting the new trends in usage of 'Interactive Radio for Education' and will be the guidelines for such another experiments not only in India but also other countries who has to take the maximum advantage of this medium.

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University has been adopting multi media approach for teaching-learning process since its inception. While the University has laid emphasis on print materials, face-to-face counselling and radio lessons in the initial years, the use of audio and video lessons played an important role in the subsequent years. While the study centre based audio/video support was emphasised until 1999, the mass media broadcasting of tele-lessons and teleconferencing has become an important component since the academic year 1999-2000. The experience of BRAOU reveals that the broadcast media has emerged as an important teaching-learning tool in the recent past. The question that is relevant now is what technology and what media mix strategy would enable the students to learn the courses better. It becomes necessary in this regard to make an assessment of the effective utilisation of the different media used by the university. There is a need to conduct an empirical study with scientific methodology so that a judicious media mix strategy can be designed with appropriate technologies to match to the learning requirements of BRAOU students.

### **Promoting media Use through assessment:**

The role of media in distance education is well established but its success largely depends on its use. If the media available is not used, or under used the objective of distance education gets defeat. Therefore whatever the media in whatever the mix there must be some kind of efforts to enhance the use of media at every level from promotion of distance education to delivery of different programmes in this mode of education. There could be different ways to enhance media utilization, e.g.. Integrating media with the evaluation can contribute to the increasing in media use in distance education.

In open universities, information and communication media are used to a limited extent. Audio-video, phone-in-radio counselling, have been very much part and parcel of the instructional system. But, electronic media has always been a supporting component rather than an essential one-- remaining an optional input. Print material is considered to be self-contained for the purpose of evaluation. Thus even though quite a large number of students are not exposed to electronic media but may pass out with higher grades. The use of such media needs to be promoted.

Another area is expected to promote initiatives having the purpose of examining the potential of technology supported learning in relation to the development of new forms of current and fiscal interventions, including examination, tests, and other forms of evaluation, based on the participants own goals of learning. It will certainly be interesting to examine and develop the new potential for storage interaction and documentation that are part of technology supported learning. This area will be decisive for the general development of technology supported learning. Since new forms of evaluation must be made to interact with the development of new form of study and teaching. The evaluation of students' knowledge should mark the progress of the learner rather than the brand failure. There is an urgent need for research on effective instructional methods and ways to evaluate students learning them.

If we look at the prevailing situation in evaluating the distance learners, evaluating is done at two levels, i.e. continual assessment and terminal examinations. The Whole evaluation is based on the course material sent in the print form to the learners. The examiners are sent the syllabi of the material available in the print form only. No account of the non-print media is sent to the examiner. That is why students use print media is the principal media. As such if the use of non-print media is to be promoted it should be linked with the assessment process. Of course the evaluation mechanism will be different than what we do in print media, giving few questions to the learner to answer what he could remember for the examinations. While assessing the learners about the non-print media, it is not only that subject content is important but also whether the media has been efficiently dealt with the purpose it has been meant, authority and effectiveness of the team of experts and media persons, scope of the particular piece of media, affectivity of the format, cost, etc. Learners must be able to evaluate media and information/knowledge contained in it through such mechanism. It will enhance their knowledge and skill to see every piece of information available on net, transmit on radio or TV, etc. not only during study days but also throughout the life..

**Conclusion:**

The use of different media besides, print for distance teaching-learning has been consciously taken to enhance its effectiveness and reach to a wider-group of learners in remote, rural, tribal and isolated areas. The use of media presents several problems. One is the fact the learners are not prepared to utilize such media. There is an almost total reliance on the print media and oral lectures in the form of counseling sessions. Such reliance hardly leaves any place for media. The linking of media with the assessment is the need of the hour, by which the use of media can be enhanced to the greater extent. For this purpose willingness of all the parties involved is a must.

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