

# **Learner Preference for Modes of Counseling – A Study**



**National Centre for Innovations in Distance Education**

**Indira Gandhi National Open University**

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# Contents

## *Acknowledgement*

### **1. Introduction**

- a. What is counseling?
- b. Who is an academic counselor?
- c. What is the role of academic counselors in distance education?
- d. What are the activities of academic counseling?
- e. Communication in counseling
- f. Use of media for counseling in Open Universities of India
- g. Objectives of the study

### **2. Design of the Study**

- a. Sample
- b. Methodology

### **3. Results**

- i. Interaction with the counselors
- ii. Attending counseling sessions
- iii. Counselling support
  - a. Face-to-Face Counseling
  - b. EduSat based two-way interaction
  - c. Interactive radio

- d. Teleconferencing
- e. E-learning
- iv. Days for attending counseling
- v. Time for attending counseling
- vi. Pattern of counseling
- vii. Aspect of the course to be covered in counseling
- viii. Job/placement related topics
- ix. Suggestions by learners.

#### **4. Discussion**

#### **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

#### **6. References**

#### **7. Suggested Reading**

*Annexure I*

*Annexure II*

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# 1. Introduction

Distance learning can be termed as learning that takes place when the teacher and learner are geographically separated from each other. It is a system of education where the learner does not have to go to an actual classroom. It circumvents the need for learners to attend classes. It is also known as a class anytime, anywhere; a class without walls, where one can learn at one's own pace, without interrupting the routine of professional or personal life.

In the distance education system, learners are physically separated from the teacher and the distance teaching institution. To link the learners and the distance teaching institutions, academic counselors or tutors are recruited at study centres who impart face-to-face counseling sessions. A link is also created through multiple media, such as print, video, audio, and through computer-mediated technology.

Counseling is an important activity in distance education and is entirely different from the usual classroom teaching. Counselors answer to the learners' questions in counseling sessions, besides clarifying their doubts and helping them to overcome difficulties they may face while going through the self learning materials. These counseling sessions also offer the students an opportunity to interact with their peers. The counselors perform various roles, such as facilitating learners about the subject matter content, assessing assignments, providing motivation and encouragement and supervising research/term papers/project work. Since counseling is such an important component of distance education, it is necessary to understand the concept. The following paragraphs describe the concept of counseling in brief.

### **a. What is counseling?**

The word counseling comes from the Middle English word *counseil*, from Old French *conseil*, from Latin *cōnsilium*; akin to *cōnsulere*, *to take counsel*, or *consult*. Counseling is defined in the International Encyclopedia of Education as "... *the process involving interpersonal relationships between a counselor and one or more clients by methods based on systematic knowledge of the human personality in attempting to improve the mental health of the latter*"<sup>1</sup>. Counseling in education may be described as the interaction developing through the relationship between a counselor and a person in a temporary state of indecision, confusion, or distress, which helps that individual to make his/her own decisions and choices, to resolve his/her confusion or cope with his/her distress in a personally realistic and meaningful way, having considerations for his/her emotional and practical needs.

### **b. Who is an academic counselor?**

The term 'academic counselor' is used for the person who has a combined function of tutoring as well as counseling. In general, counseling is person specific, and also related to personal and individual needs. Ultimately we can say that counseling is student-centred, and communication is substantially from the student to the counselor. To be a counselor requires positive human attributes, such as warmth and ability to listen, together with the skills of using these in a variety of media, mainly correspondence, telephone and face-to-face situations.

The activity that takes place during the counseling sessions (face-to face contact programme) or through other electronic media, such as teleconferencing, or computer conferencing is termed as 'academic counseling'. Academic counseling

can be provided on a one-to-one basis also over the telephone over the internet or through letters and even during face-to-face contact with the counselor.

**c. What is the role of academic counselors in distance education?**

The academic counselors in the distance education system bridge the gap between the learner and the teaching institution. They play a key role in enabling the students to become an active and effective learner. They set the context, help students pose questions to explore, stimulate problem solving, and give the students tools and resources to use so that they can construct knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

**d. What are the activities of academic counseling ?**

Counseling in distance education is considered as an important component of the teaching and learning process. It is also called as "Distance Tution". The counseling sessions are not lecture-oriented, rather the academic counselors are trained to use problem solving, and small group teaching skills to conduct the sessions with the aid of available audio and video materials. The activities of academic counseling is broadly divided into the three parts.

a) Informing

b) Advising

c) Counseling

**Informing.** It involves giving appropriate and correct information, which is largely independent of the learner. During counseling, the counselors are expected to provide accurate and appropriate information, as well as to communicate it

clearly. For example, if a learner wants to know if the Bachelors in Business Administration (BBA) course is offered by IGNOU or what is the qualification required for Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.), it will be informed to the learner that the qualification required for B.Sc is 10+2. The same question, if asked by twenty learners will have the same answer.

**Advising:** A learner may raise a query which has several responses, and advising means to give the best suggestion and also tell the related possibilities to the learner. Many times the learner is confused as to which course is best for him/her from the future point of view. At that time it is necessary for them to consult an academic counselor who would advise them what is best for them. For example, if a learner wants to become an engineer, then the counselor can tell him/her about two engineering courses, i.e., Civil and Electrical course, and then advise him /her to join the desired Course.

**Counseling:** Counseling may help the learners in understanding their needs, feelings or motivations so that they can make appropriate decisions for themselves. They should be able to decide for themselves what is best for them regarding the choice of course, career etc.

The counseling sessions are usually not compulsory for the learners to attend, but these sessions are considered highly useful by the learners in order to fulfill the following requirements:

- i) These sessions solve their academic problems and doubts;
- ii) These sessions enable the learners to use the library and audio/visual materials at the study centre; and

iii) During these sessions, the learners meet other learners and overcome the sense/feeling of isolation.

At IGNOU, the counseling sessions are organized regularly at the study centers. These sessions are conducted by part-time academic counselors. These counselors also evaluate the tutor marked assignments submitted by the learners at the study centre.<sup>3</sup>

The principal goal of counseling in a distance learning environment is to provide "individualized guidance" to the learners in the mode preferred by the learner. Counselors are expected to identify the following in an academic counseling:

- Know the academic abilities and background of a learner;
- Know the objectives, interests and motivation of learner;
- Be familiar with University regulations;
- Should be able to identify academic programmes;
- Capitalize in academic planning on those things which enhance motivation;
- Be available to the students;
- Know when and whom to refer to;
- Flexible;
- Enthusiastic/Committed;
- Patient;
- Friendly;
- Respecting individuals; and

- Positive.

The goal of providing counseling to distance learners should be characterized by the following qualities:

- Convenient — ideally accessible any time, any place;
- Advisors help students to feel a part of the community, develop academic and career goals, be successful learners;
- Understand the type of students the institution is serving at a distance and what their needs are;
- Equal, but not necessarily the same, services provided to on-campus students;
- To act as the ombudsman for advisee with the institution, administrators, faculty and staff to understand their academic and personal development needs;
- To redesign academic advising for distance learners not just introduce technology<sup>4</sup>.

#### **e. Communication in counseling**

The medium for counseling delivery can be face-to-face or at a distance with the assistance of technology. The communication medium can be what is read from text, what is heard from audio, or what is seen and heard in person or from video. The interaction process for counseling can be synchronous or asynchronous. Communication in distance education is divided into two types; *asynchronous communication* and *synchronous communication*. In asynchronous communication, counseling is provided at a different time from the learner's study schedule. Asynchronous interaction occurs with a time gap between the responses of the counselor and the learner. This gap allows the teachers to deposit information for

the future use of learners. Email and printed learning materials are examples of asynchronous counseling. In synchronous communication, counseling is provided at the same time as the learner studies the topic. Synchronous interaction occurs with little or no time gap in time between the responses of the counselor and the learner. Interactive radio, teleconferencing, audio and video conferencing, and online chat are common examples of synchronous counseling.

#### **f. Use of media for counseling in Open Universities of India**

The use of media and technology has considerably reduced the gap between the teacher and the learner. The various media options (self-instructional print material, audio cassettes, video cassettes, interactive radio counseling, teleconferencing, and web-enabled education) being used by the different Indian Open Universities are given in *Annexure I*.

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is a technology-enabled education provider. It provides a multi-media system of learning comprising self-instructional print material, audio, video, radio, television, teleconferencing, interactive radio counseling, Internet-based learning and face-to-face counseling (Figure 1). Figure 2 provides the schematic representation of the media used in IGNOU.



*Figure 1. Media used in IGNOU*

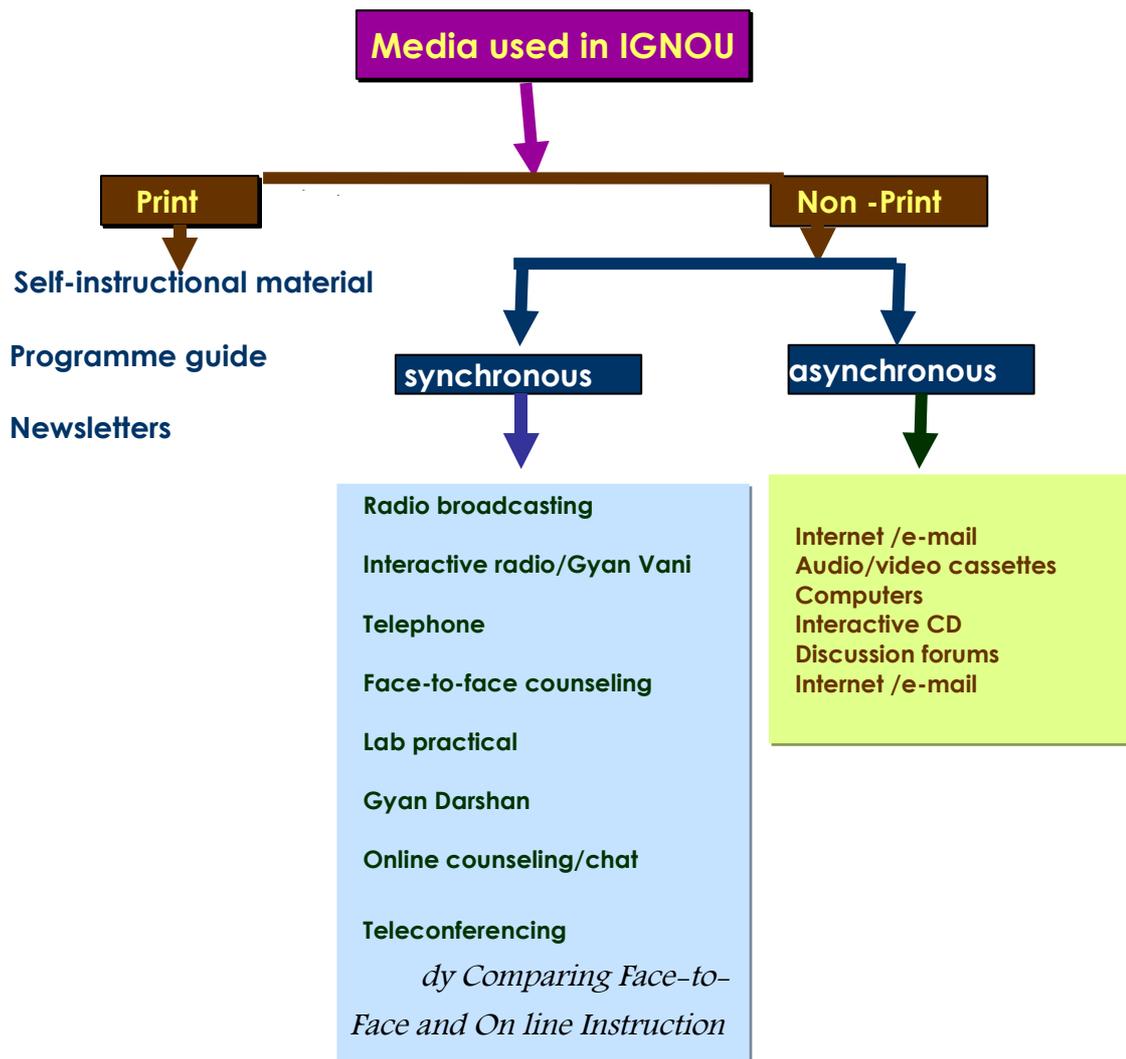


Figure 2. Media used in IGNOU (based on IGNOU Profile, 2000).

The various modes of counseling available to the learner at IGNOU is described below.

**a. Face-to-Face.** When a learner joins a programme in IGNOU, s/he is assigned a study center of his/her choice. Subject wise counseling is provided at the study center with the help of locally available resources as per the counseling schedule prepared for the center. This counseling is a face-to-face interaction. The learner is expected to go through the study material and clear his/her doubts regarding the material during the counseling session. Depending upon the requirement of the learner s/he may like to attend the counseling session at the study center.

Face-to-Face is the most traditional form of delivering education and the one with which people will have had direct experience. The face-to-face sessions become interactive by snow balling, brainstorming, discussion, debate, syndicate groups, buzz groups, role play, simulation and by games also. Face-to-face communication is seen as the richest form of information processing because it provides immediate feedback. It includes activities such as lectures, demonstrations, tutorials, presentations, seminars. It is likely that a course offered/delivered primarily through face-to-face mode will have some elements that involve independent study, such as supplementary reading, research and writing of assignments. Generally as learners mature and as their study skills become more sophisticated, the ratio of independent to classroom-based study increases. In case of distance education teachers and learners interact at a distance. Occasionally, the learners meet the teachers in face-to-face counseling sessions. Regarding the quality of learning through distance education, much of the research has concluded that learning through distance education is as good as the learning through face-to-face

education.<sup>5</sup> Distance learning has been developed in recent years to allow learners more flexibility than they would normally encounter in face-to-face course. Learners attend some sort of learning centre at times that suit them and work through course materials at their own pace. Interestingly, the technology of videoconferencing also allows learners and instructors to have a look and feel of “face-to-face” interaction in distance education.

**b. Teleconferencing:** The word 'teleconferencing' can be taken to mean interactive electronic communication among people located at two or more different places. In the context of distance education, teleconferencing provides live interaction through electronic means among learner groups/ teachers/distance education functionaries located at different places.

Teleconferencing was introduced in India by the University Grants Commission in 1991 and subsequently by IGNOU as an additional element of interactivity to supplement satellite-based television broadcast. The process of teleconferencing involves interaction through the television. At present IGNOU carries out 2-way-audio-1-way-video teleconferencing for subject-wise sessions. Faculty resources at the headquarters interact with the learners across the country in a 2-way-audio-1-way-video live interaction. A learner can see and listen to the faculty on the TV sets provided at the study centre and interact with them live by means of telephone calls from the centre. This has resulted in considerable enhancement of the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process. Experiments of this kind were recently conducted by several institutions in our country in collaboration with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).<sup>6</sup> This technology has been used as a medium of instruction by North American Higher Education and

*Multidimensional Audio conferencing Classification System (MACS) which was developed to measure and record instructional interactions in teleconferencing courses.*<sup>7</sup>

**c) Interactive Radio counseling:** In Interactive Radio Counselling (IRC) the experts are invited who counsel the learners through radio (*Gyan Vani*). The learners interact with the experts through telephone to get their queries answered through the radio. Since radios are accessible to the learners in their own homes, they can tune into the programmes anywhere and talk back with the faculty using the toll free number given by IGNOU.

The IRC was initiated on an experimental basis as a sponsored programme in May 1998 from the All India Radio (AIR) station in Bhopal. The very next year (in March 1999), the services of IRC were extended to nine more stations. Currently, the same facility has been extended to all the primary channels of AIR. The programmes are broadcast live through 186 radio stations across the country, mostly on Sundays. In IRC, subject experts are invited at a fixed time and day to the AIR station. The students and other learners are informed in advance through various media about the topic of discussion. IRC is a live programme, where the learners dial the studio when the programme is on air, to interact with the subject counselors. Toll-free telephone facility is available from 80 cities, enabling learners to interact with experts and seek instant clarifications. This particular facility is being shared with state open universities, as well as being used for the coordinated growth of the open distance learning system in the country.

**d. EduSat based counseling:** The launch of EduSat (a dedicated satellite for education) has ushered in an era where both Internet and Intranet can be used for

transmission, interaction, dialogue, digital repositories, digital multimedia content, and for virtual education and research. The Electronic Media Production Centre at IGNOU has already established 134 interactive terminals across the country with the two way interactive facility (Figure 3).<sup>8</sup> The teleconferencing sessions on *Gyan Darshan (GD)-2* are simultaneously telecast (simulcasted) on the EduSat network. The facility is expected to enhance the capacity of the learners to access the resources as per the schedule. Networking of all *Gyan Vani* FM Radio Stations is also under consideration.

EduSat is a unique facility provided to IGNOU learners to have two way interactive video counseling. It gives a look and feel of a face-to-face counseling session. There is a virtual interaction between the learners at the study centres and the experts at IGNOU headquarters. The learner can interact with the experts through the two-way video mode. In case the learner misses a session, s/he can request for the recording of the session. In future the learners will be using EduSat for video-on-demand facilities.

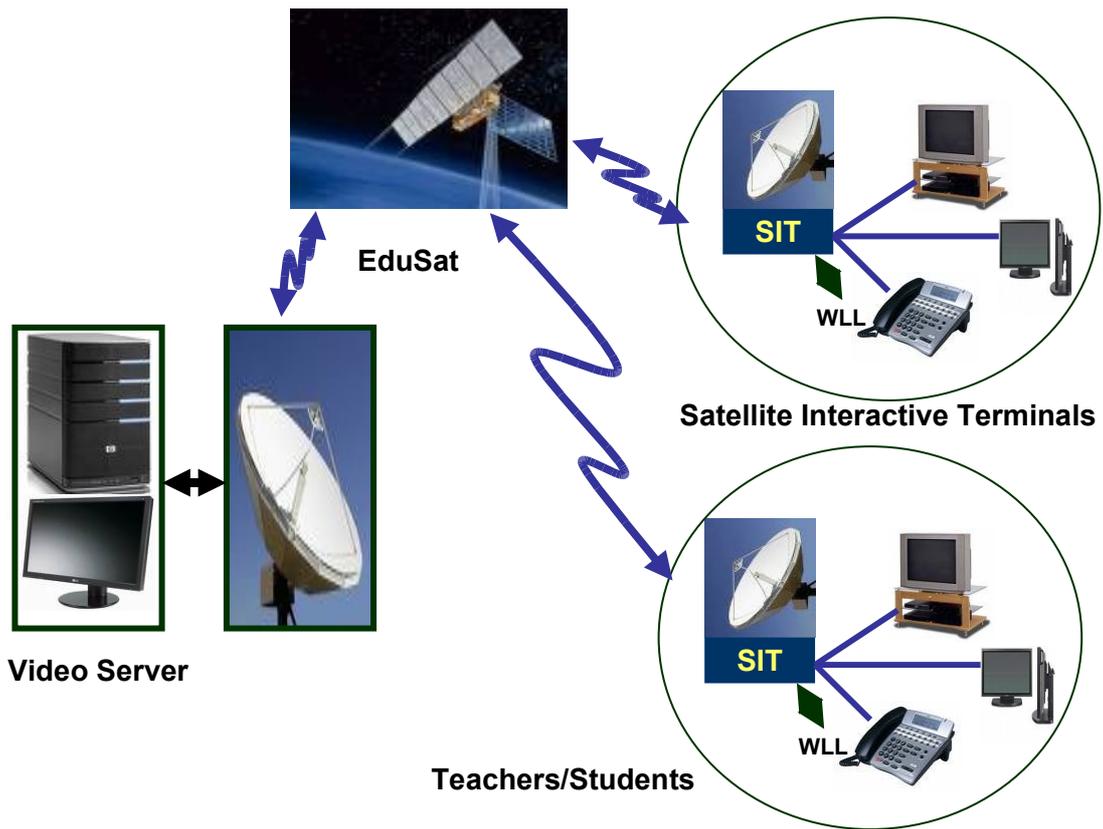


Figure 3. Configuration of EduSat Network

**g. Objective of the study**

The main objective of this study was to learn about the preference of the learners for the mode of counseling. This study is expected to aid in formulating suitable and innovative counseling strategies for the learners in future.

## 2. Design of the Study

**a. Sample:** This study was carried out on the enrolled learners of IGNOU at the different study centres spread all over India. The sample size was a total of 1993, which comprised graduate learners of Education (B.Ed) and post graduate learners of Management (MBA).

**b. Methodology:** A questionnaire was employed for the study. The questionnaires were sent to the Regional Centres of IGNOU through mail to be distributed to the learners in the Study Centres. The questionnaire was structured with a few objective type questions, a question employing the five-point Likert scale and an open ended question for suggestions (*Annexure II*). The filled in questionnaires were received from various parts of the country.

### 3. Results

The data were analysed and the results are presented below.

**1. Interaction with the counselors.** The learners were asked about their preference for a medium for interaction with the counselors from among the various media of website, email, mobile, post or any other medium. A majority of the learners (41 %) preferred interaction with the counselors by post. However, a considerable number of learners (37 %) wanted to interact through the mobile phone. About 11% of the learners preferred email and about 11% of the learners preferred interaction through the website (Figure 4).

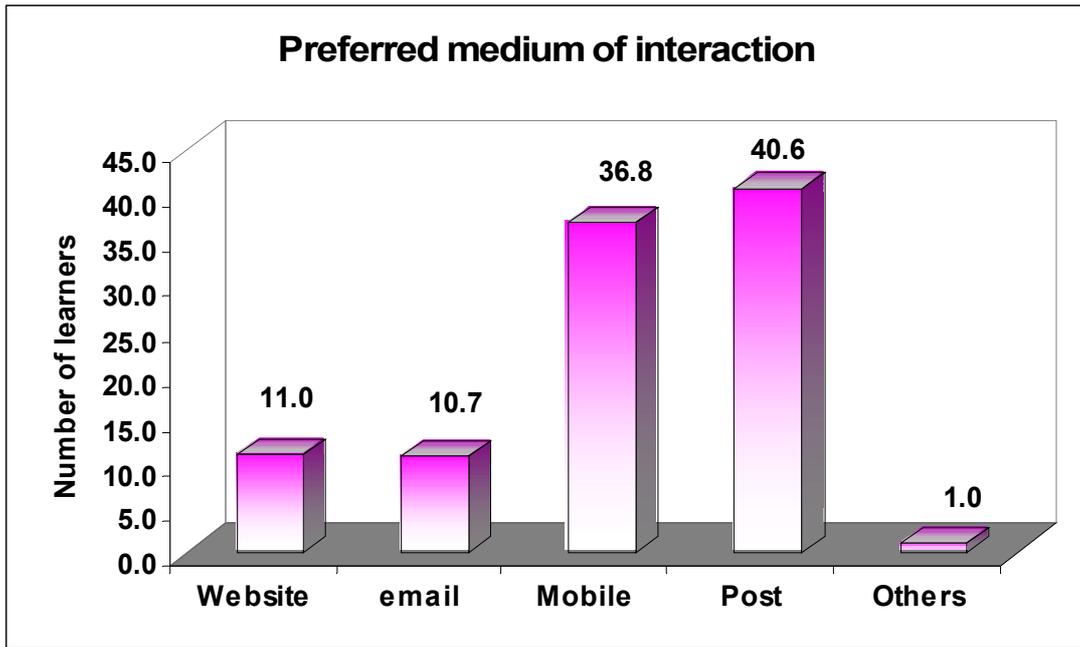


Figure 4. Preferred medium of interaction by the learners.

**2. Attending counseling sessions:** The learners were asked whether they would like to attend the counseling sessions. A huge majority (95 %) of the learners preferred to attend the counseling sessions. Only about 5 % of the learners were of the opinion that it was not important to attend these sessions (Figure 5).

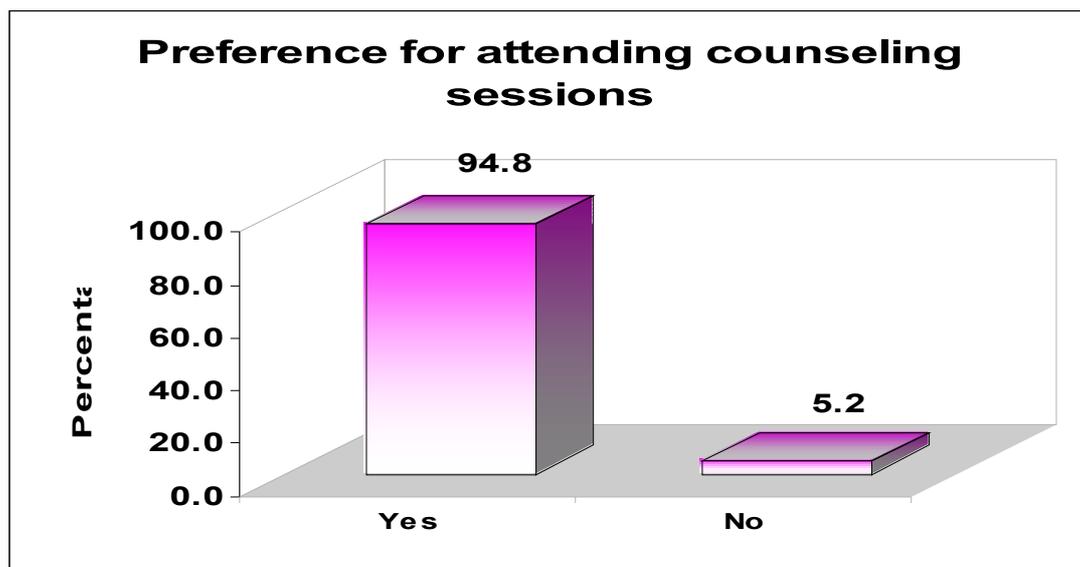


Figure 5. Preference for attending counseling sessions by the learners.

**3. Counselling support.** The learners were asked about how they would like to be supported during counseling sessions. They were provided a choice of five media viz. a) Face to Face Counseling, b) Edusat Based two way interaction, c) Interactive radio, d) Teleconferencing and, e) E-learning. The learners were asked to give their inputs according to the five point scale provided in the question 3 of the questionnaire (Annexure II). The results are provided below:

**a. Face-to-Face Counseling.** About 76 % of the learners gave the highest preference to face-to-face counseling. However, about 21 % of the learners gave a low preference to face-to-face counseling. Only about 3 % of the learners considered face-to-face counseling unimportant. (Figure 6).

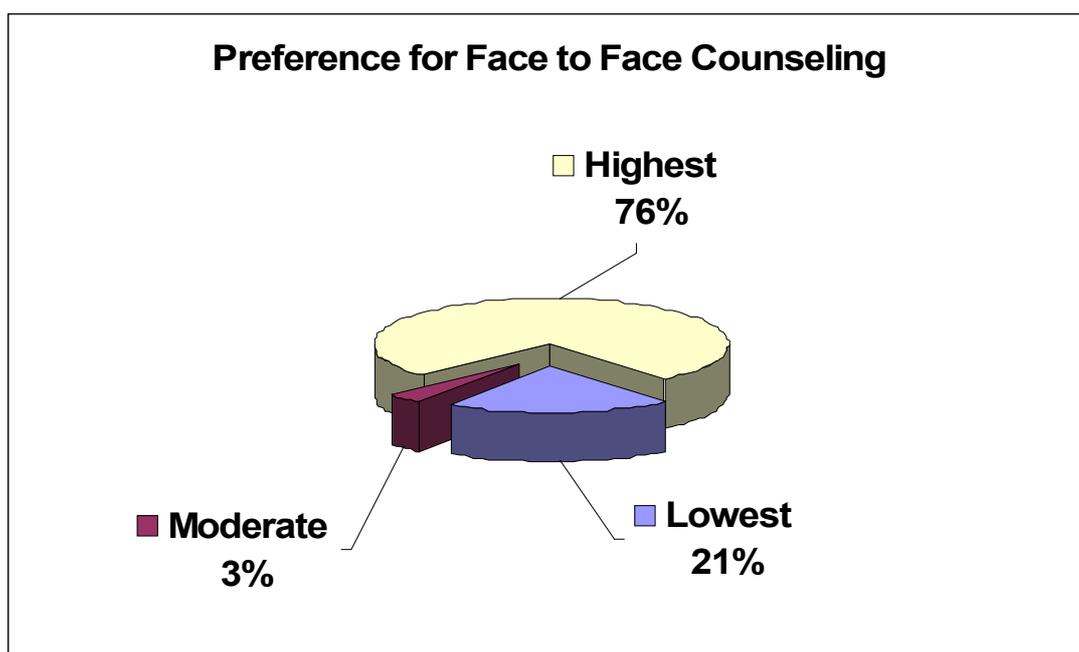


Figure 6. Preference for face-to-face counseling sessions by the learners.

**b. EduSat based two-way interaction.** A majority (48 %) of the learners showed their preference for a two way interaction through EduSat, with 33 % giving it the lowest preference and 19 % giving it a moderate preference (Figure 7).

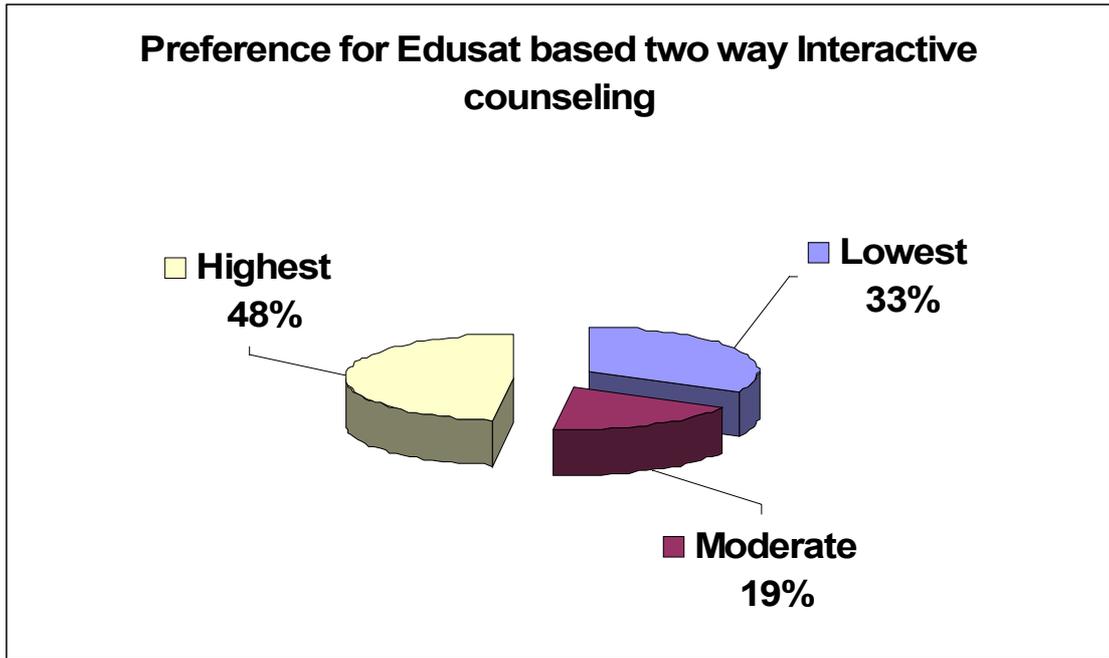


Figure 7. Preference for EduSat based two way interactive counseling sessions by the learners.

c. **Interactive radio.** The preference given to interactive radio was low to the lowest (45%) with 30% of the learners giving it a moderate preference, and 25 % giving it

high to the highest preference (Figure 8).

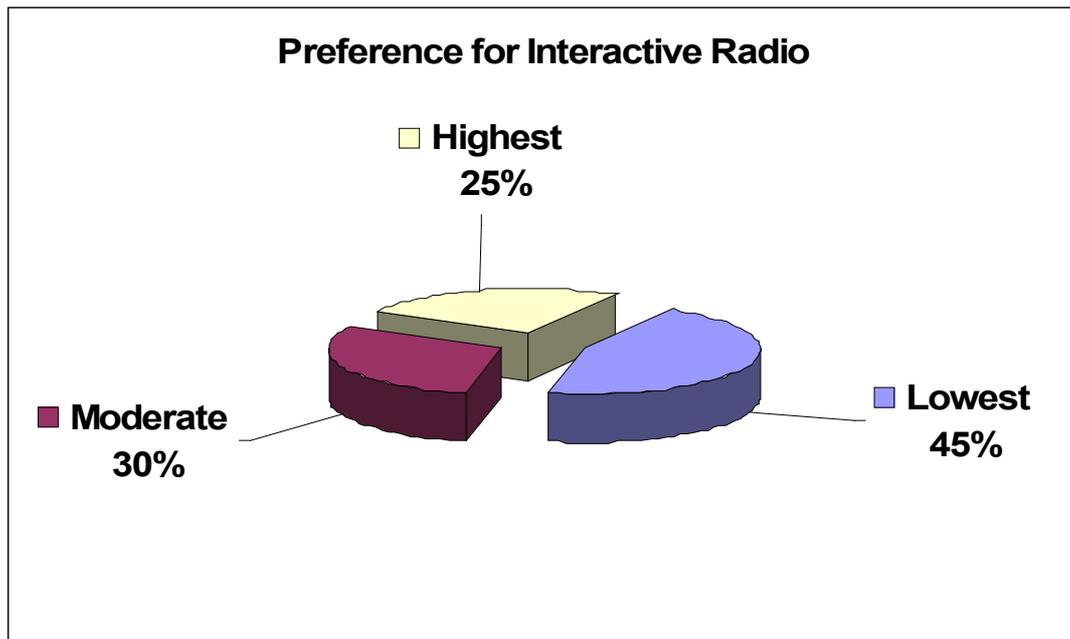


Figure 8. Preference for Interactive Radio counseling sessions by the learners.

d. **Teleconferencing.** The preference given to teleconferencing was also low to the lowest (46 %) with 21 % of the learners giving it a moderate preference, and only 33

% of the learners giving it high to the highest preference (Figure 9).

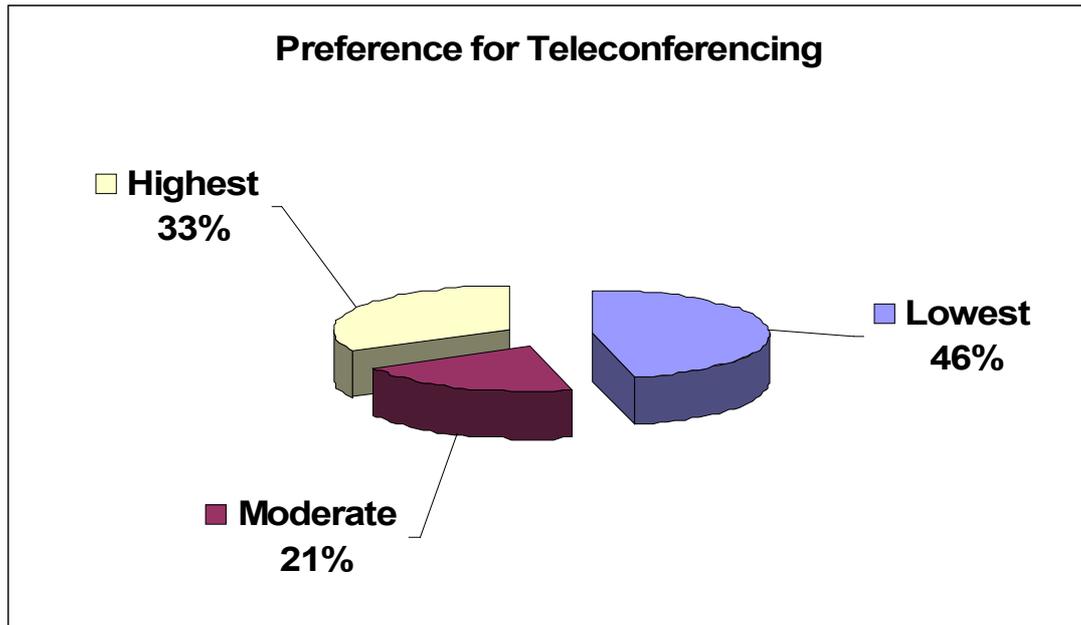


Figure 9. Preference for teleconferencing sessions by the learners.

e. **E-learning.** About 47 % of the learners gave low to the lowest preference to e-learning and about 16 % of the learners showed moderate preference to it. About 37 % of the learners highly preferred e-learning mode for counseling (Figure 10).

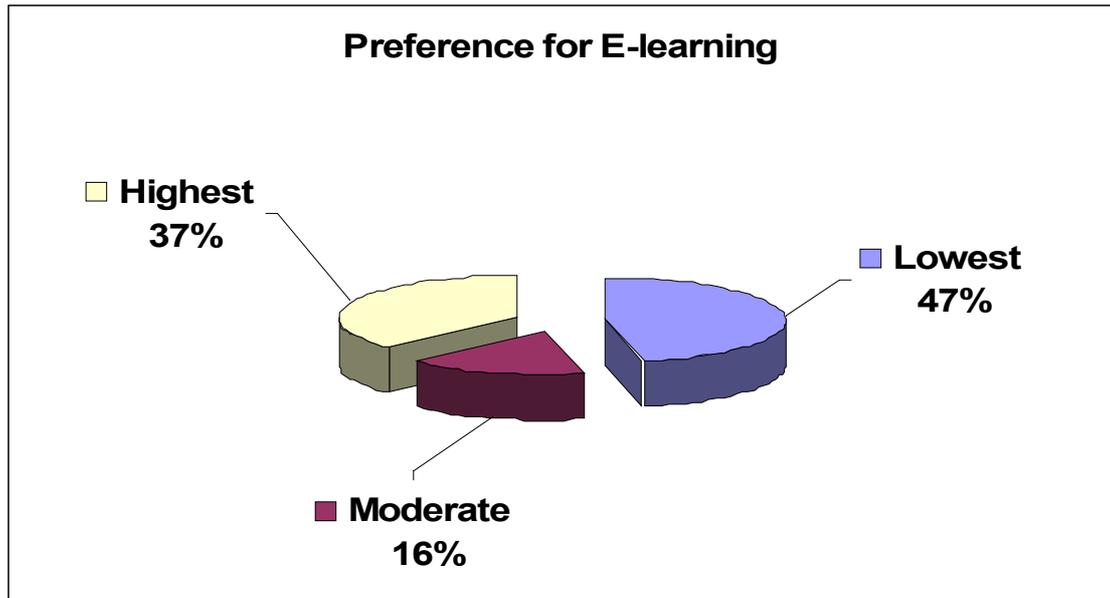


Figure 10. Preference for e-learning mode for counseling sessions by the learners.

**4. Days for attending counseling.** The learners were asked for their preferred days for attending counseling sessions from among a) Weekdays, b) Saturdays and Sundays, c) All days. A majority of the learners (93 %) preferred Saturdays and Sundays to working days for attending counseling sessions while 4.4 % preferred weekdays. About 2.3 % learners were in favor of counseling for all days (Figure 11).

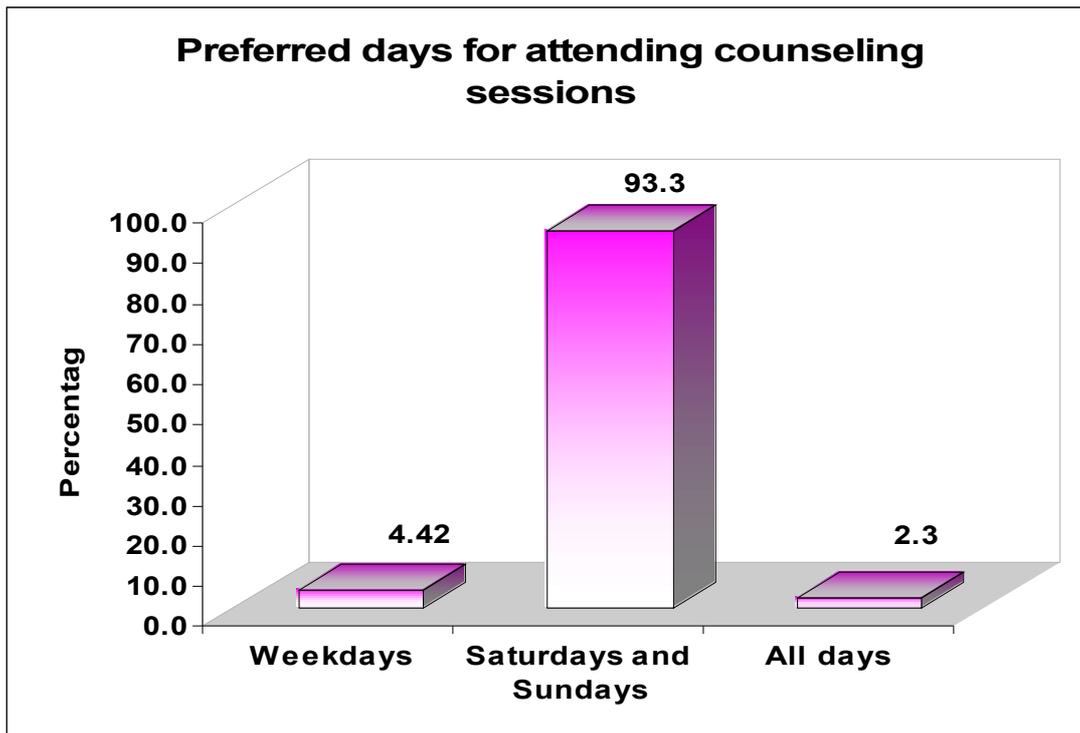


Figure 11. Preferred days for attending counseling sessions by the learners.

**5. Time for attending counseling:** The learners were asked for their preferred time for attending counseling sessions from among a) Morning, b) Afternoon, c) Evening and, d) Night. About 41 % of the learners preferred attending counseling sessions in the afternoon whereas about 38 % preferred morning. About 18 % preferred evening time and 3% preferred night time for attending the counseling sessions (Figure 12).

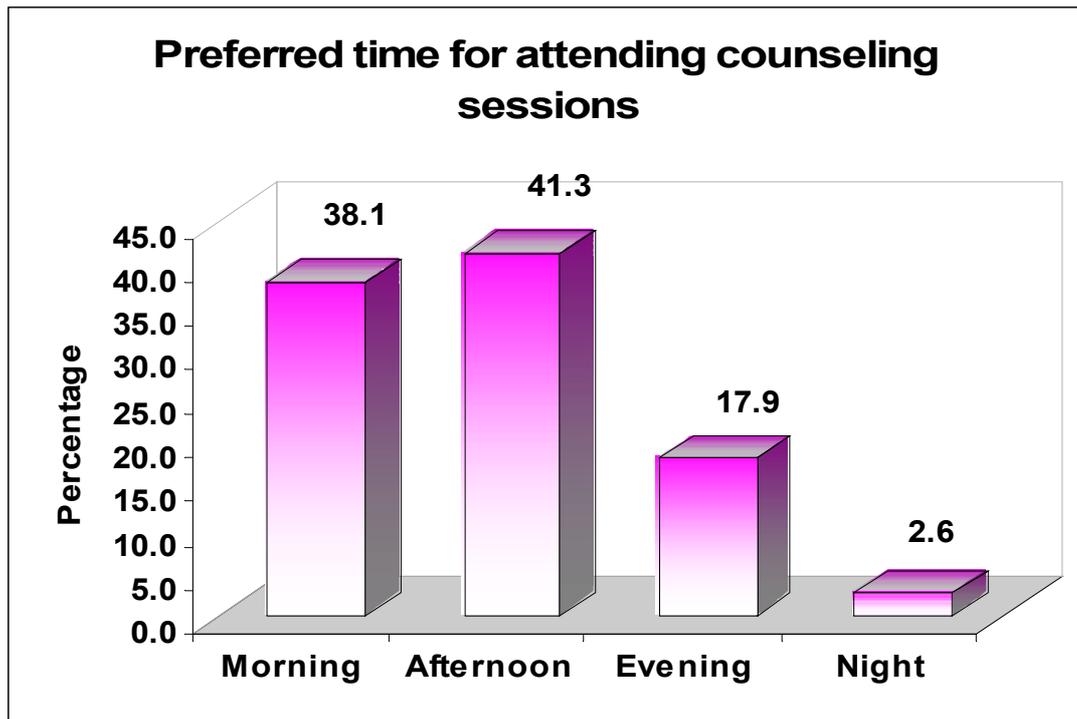


Figure 12. Preferred time of the day for attending counseling sessions by the learners.

**6. Pattern of counseling.** The learners were asked about their preference for pattern of counseling i.e. either synchronous, or asynchronous. About 78 % of the learners preferred counseling in the synchronous mode as against 23 % preferring it in the asynchronous mode (Figure 13).

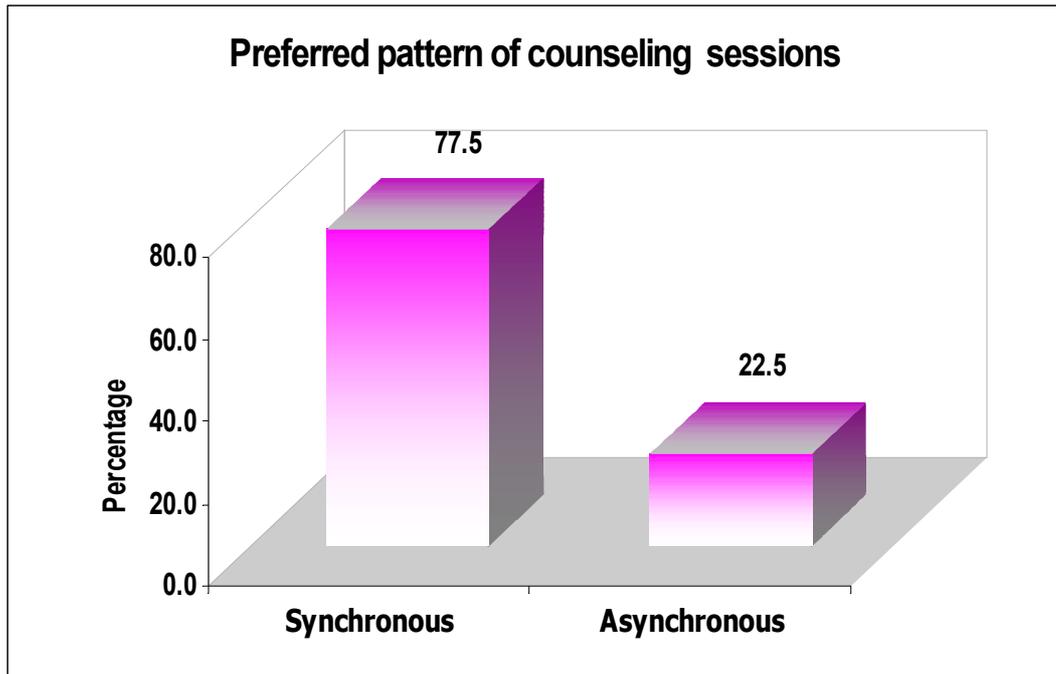


Figure 13. Preferred mode for attending counseling sessions by the learners.

7. **Aspect of the course to be covered in counseling:** The learners were asked about the aspect of the course they would like to be covered in counseling sessions. The choice given was a) All topics, b) Difficult topics, c) Materials added over to that provided in print, d) Project components and, e) Others (Please specify). About 46 % of the learners wanted the difficult topics to be covered during counseling. About 39

% of the learners wanted all topics to be discussed during counseling (Figure 14).

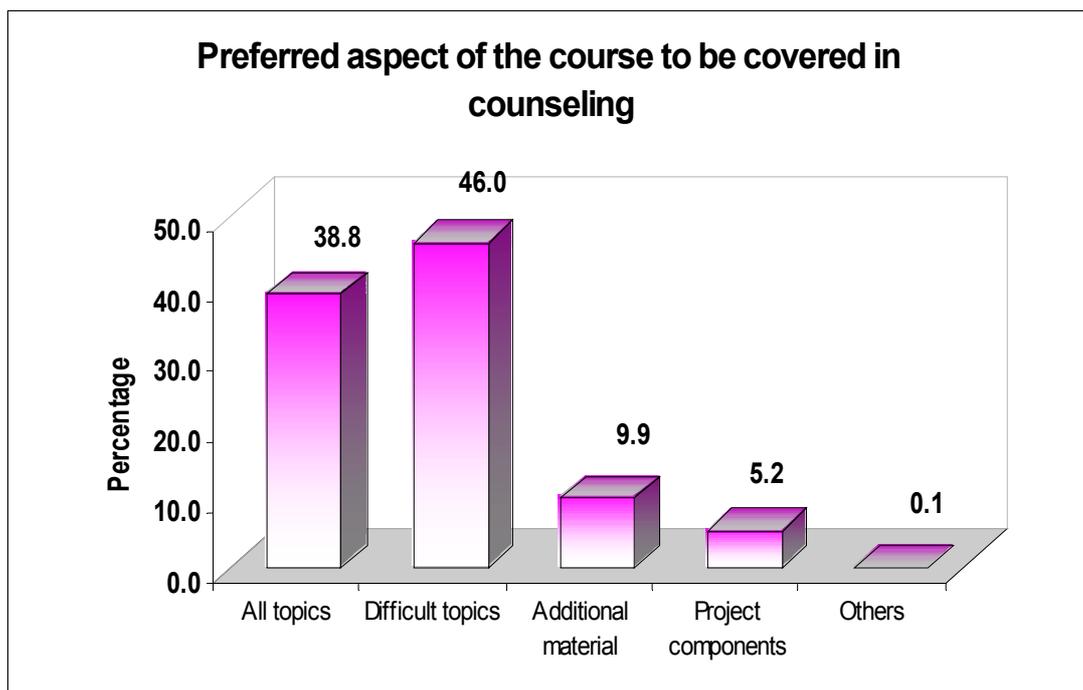
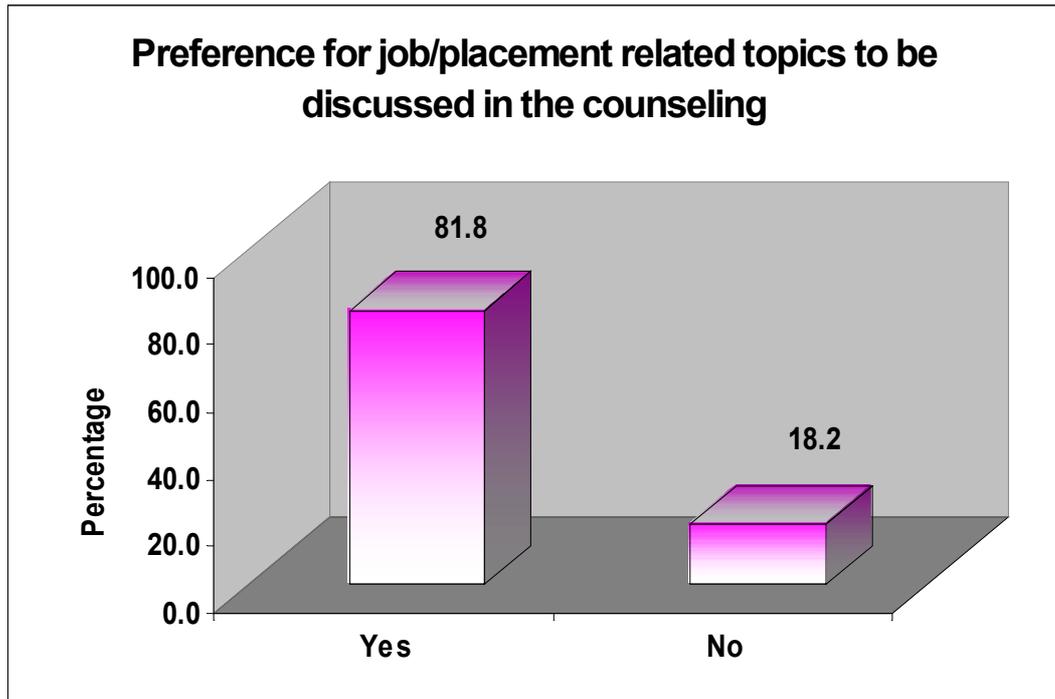


Figure 14. Preferred aspect of the course to be covered during counseling sessions by the learners.

**8. Job/placement related topics.** Learners were asked whether they would like to have job/placements related topics to be discussed in the counseling sessions. About 82 % of the learners wanted that job related topics should be discussed during counseling. About 18 % of the learners did not have preference for discussing job related topics in the counseling sessions (Figure 15).



**Figure 15. Preference for Job/placement related topics to be discussed during counseling sessions by the learners.**

**9. Suggestions by learners:** Learners were also asked to give other suggestions regarding counseling. The learners provided several suggestions based on their experiences of attending counseling sessions. Some of them are presented below.

- i. The duration of counseling sessions should be increased. These sessions should be held at a convenient time, such as during holidays and vacations.
- ii. The number of counseling sessions should be increased.
- iii. The counseling sessions should be intimated to the students well in advance so that learners can make the best use of it. Also, during teleconferencing or interactive radio counseling, it should be made sure that the telephone lines are working and the calls of the learners get through to the faculty sitting in the studios.

- iv. The counseling sessions should focus on difficult topics to clear doubts and queries, and should be lively, dynamic, interactive and informative.
- v. Counseling through online (web based) and offline (CDs) that are multimedia enriched, and through mobile, have been suggested by a considerable number of learners.

## 4. Discussion

Although counseling has traditionally been viewed as a person-to-person activity, the future of counseling resides on the degree to which technology can be deployed to increase both the efficiency and effectiveness of advising. The widening use of two-way communication technologies is, in fact, helping distance educators develop their own kinds of interactive classrooms. Small and large, local and regional group configurations of learners are created via telephone classes, computer conferencing and face-to-face meetings and workshops. Given this trend, we may also be able to develop closer links with classroom educators and break down the professional “breed apart” connotation of distance educators.<sup>9</sup>

In today’s era, technology plays a key role in the delivery of distance education; educators must remain focused on instructional outcomes. The focus is basically on the needs of the learners, the requirements of the content, and the constraints faced by the teacher, before selecting a delivery system. Using technology as an integrated approach, the educator's task is to carefully select among the technological options. The goal is to build a mix of instructional media, meeting the needs of the learner in a manner that is instructionally effective and economically prudent.

A study was carried out in 2003 to look into the impact of electronic media on counseling from the perspective of the academic counselor<sup>10</sup>. The availability of various media at the study centers is presented in Table I. The results of this study revealed a positive perception of academic counselors regarding the impact of

electronic media on various activities associated with teaching learning process in Distance Education. The perception of counselors varied depending on the programmes and the level they were associated with. The counselors of computer programme reported a relatively more positive impact as compared to others. Within the given academic activities, a higher degree of improvement in developing the skill of understanding the fact was felt by all counselors counseling at UG level, while PG counselors believed that electronic media were relatively more helpful in improving the overall performance of the learners.

The study also indicated that the greater the media available; the higher will be their effective utilization by the counselors. Therefore, steps such as availability of various media at the study centers, provision of requisite infrastructure & supporting technologies for use of various media, and developing the skill and attitude in counsellors/educators to handle the various media etc. should be taken for providing better academic support to the learners.

**Table I. Media availability at study centers of IGNOU (2003)**

<b>Media/Technology</b>	<b>Per cent availability</b>	<b>Per cent used</b>
Telephone	92.5	71.6
Computer	86.6	55.2
Internet	32.4	33
Gyan darshan	30	20.4
Gyan vani	18.8	14.5
Cable TV	22	15.5
Audio Cassettes	60.9	40.8
Vedio Cassettes	69.7	49.6

CD ROMs	56	30.8
Fax	17.2	10.5
Morning TV	23.1	14.5
Teleconference	20.6	9.7

Delamont (1986)<sup>11</sup> in her studies of face-to-face interaction described how the teacher's position in front of a group was characterized by three traits: privacy that he/she has in a classroom, immediacy means he/she gets response immediately, and autonomy means he/she has to decide on her/his own how to react. Our results also show that 95 % of the learners preferred to attend the counseling sessions. A majority of the learners wanted face to face counseling (76 %) as they felt this mode made the topics easy to understand. Since almost all of the learners come from conventional education system, where classes are conducted, this tendency is obvious.

EduSat is fully dedicated for educational purpose in our country. Millions of illiterate people in remote, rural India could have access to an education with the help of this educational satellite. The EduSat network provides satellite-based tele-education facilities to students and teachers of the engineering colleges across the country. It is expected to use the virtual classroom concept to offer education to children in remote villages, quality higher education to students in areas without access to good technical institutes, adult literacy programmes and training modules for teachers. EduSat can provide connectivity to schools, colleges and higher levels of education and also support non-formal education including developmental communication. In our study, the learners have shown high preference for EduSat based two-way counseling (48 %).

Radio is extensively used for broadcasting educational programmes mainly because of its wide accessibility and moderate cost. In India, despite rapid developments in communication technologies in the last few decades, radio broadcasting remains the cheapest mode of mass communication that can benefit rural and deprived communities with low literacy rates and little access to education. The University of Delhi works in association with AIR Delhi for providing education through radio. Many Open Universities in the country also use radio broadcasts. Language learning projects are also a popular form of using the medium of radio. A prominent example of the same is called the “Radio-pilot project”<sup>12</sup> aimed at covering 500 primary schools of Jaipur and Ajmer in order to teach Hindi language. These projects help successfully in improving the vocabulary of students by a very large measure. The learners of IGNOU have been availing the interactive radio sessions of *Gyan Vani*. In our study, the learners' preference for interactive radio was low at 45 %. This aspect needs to be addressed seriously.

Television is a very attractive and useful audiovisual medium which is widely used for imparting education in the developed as well as the developing countries. This medium is particularly useful for demonstration of laboratory experiments etc. Some of the developed countries have evolved useful combinations of cable TV, electronic blackboard, fibre optics and telephone that convert a simple television set into a powerful and educational tool called the Telidon—a Canadian video system. The British Open University has developed an extremely versatile audio-visual teaching medium called Cyclops which is based on the conventional TV set, standard audio cassettes and micro-computer technology. The Cyclops can also be linked to a telephone and that increases its versatility as a teaching tool.<sup>13</sup> In the China Central Radio and Television University, programs are distributed by satellite to local

educational TV stations which broadcast them to local audiences. Local governments are responsible for the setting-up of local TV stations and for local study centers with playback facilities. At the local study centers students complete most of their course work after viewing the teleclasses. This workload consists of additional readings and face-to-face lectures.<sup>14</sup>

The learners of IGNOU have been availing the teleconferencing sessions of *Gyan Darshan*. A study from the relative analysis of radio and TV as media in India concluded that the major factors that decide the growth and application of an ICT in distance education are the access to the media, its cost effectiveness, its user friendliness and its pedagogic value.<sup>12</sup> In our study, the learners' preference for and teleconferencing has been low (46 %). The low preferences for both Interactive Radio counseling and teleconferencing can be attributed to the low duration, and the low interactivity levels between the counselors and the learners during the teleconferencing and interactive radio sessions. Further, as several of the learners have indicated in this study, their telephone calls do not get communicated immediately to the counselors sitting in the studio. These bottlenecks need to be looked into seriously and innovative mechanisms of information and communication mechanisms need to be put in place. The instruction approaches used by the teachers also need to be made innovative.

Currently in IGNOU, approximately 10 per cent of students are involved with online education as compared to other formats.<sup>15</sup> In our study, about 37 % of the learners preferred counseling through e-learning.

Many learners in our study have preferred synchronous counseling (78 %) as opposed to asynchronous counseling (22 %). However, due to the lack of time

available for counseling, asynchronous mode is often preferable for the counselors. While teaching on line asynchronicity gives the teacher the opportunity to reply on additional resources that strengthen his/her control over knowledge. In a study it was found that interaction contributes significantly to the achievement of distance learners. This problem may be solved using the modern ICT tools. In our study, several learners have provided suggestions that counseling in the form of CDs may be provided to them to make their study time flexible, so that they can avail of this feature as and when they find time. Since many of the distance learners are working persons, they prefer Saturdays and Sundays to working days for attending counseling sessions. This is substantiated by our study where about 93 % wanted to attend counseling sessions on holidays. About 41 % of the learners preferred attending counseling sessions in the afternoon whereas about 38 % preferred morning. The preference for evening and night sessions were extremely low at 18 % and 3 % respectively. This data helps us to identify the right days and times for scheduling counseling sessions for the learners. Although many learners wanted all the topics to be covered in the counseling sessions, a considerable number (46 %) of learners wanted that the difficult topics to be covered. This, they suggested, would help them in clearing their concepts and removing doubts effectively. This result suggests that during counseling sessions, more stress should be given on discussing the hard spots of a unit or a course rather than giving a general talk/lecture on the topic.

Finally, a large number of learners have preferred jobs and placements to be discussed in the counseling sessions. The sample in this study comprises MBA and B Ed students. Therefore, for them, the knowledge of job prospects after completing the course is extremely important. This would be the same for other courses as well.

IGNOU has established a placement cell in place for its learners. A tie up of the counselors with the cell is suggested to address this issue.

Today's distance education system calls for teachers who can rethink and retool every aspect of teaching strategy and methodology for an online environment. ICT tools have made education accessible to the wider section of our society and have introduced a paradigm shift in the responsibility of the teacher from "repository of all knowledge" to "facilitator of information and student learning." It's almost as if a teacher has become a moderator/facilitator instead of a didactic talking head standing in front of a group of students (sage on the stage) imparting his/her knowledge to them.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The above discussion leads us to conclude that counseling services are an important component for the learning process through distance mode. At present, the learners prefer face-to-face counseling. However, they have shown a strong willingness to adopt ICT enabled counseling modes as well, such as through mobiles, website, multimedia CDs, email etc., which are essentially interactive in nature. Given the large number of learners of IGNOU, it is not always possible to provide quality in synchronous counseling through face-to-face. This calls for effective and innovative mechanisms of asynchronous counseling, especially through latest ICT tools.

Based on the above findings, the following are recommended.

### **Specific Recommendations**

1. Effective solutions should be developed for facilitating the learners' asynchronous learning through ICT tools, such as mobile, websites, multimedia CDs, email, etc.
2. Emphasis should be on maximum use of EDUSAT and the Satellite Interactive Terminals, which support 2 way audio / video mechanisms and Voice over Internet Phone (VoIP), to provide the distance learners a virtual classroom that gives the look and feel of a real classroom.
3. Solutions for effective management of the teleconferencing and Interactive Radio Counseling sessions should be developed so that the learners can easily

access the counselor sitting in the studio at the time of telecast, and even after the telecast.

### **General Recommendations**

1. The difficult topics should be discussed on a priority basis during counseling sessions.
2. The counseling sessions should be preferably held during Saturdays, Sundays and on holidays.
3. The counseling sessions should be preferably held in the morning and afternoon.
4. To address the learners' queries related to job prospects after completing a particular course, a tie up of the counselors with the placement cell is recommended.

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*Annexure I*

**Media adoption in Indian Open Universities. •**

<b>Open University</b>	<b>Audio Cassettes</b>	<b>Video Cassettes</b>	<b>Interactive Radio Counselling</b>	<b>Interactive Teleconferencing</b>	<b>Web-Enabled Education</b>	<b>Instructional support</b>
Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)	√	√	√	√	√	Print, multimedia mix, online system
Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU)	√	√	√	√		Print, multimedia mix
Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU)	√	√	√	√	√	Print, multimedia mix
Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University (MPBOU)	√	√				Print, multimedia mix
Karnataka State Open University (KSOU)	√	√	√			Print, audio, video, and radio
Vardhman Mahavir Open University	√	√				Print, audio and video

(VMOU) earlier KOU						
Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University(BAOU)	√	√				Print, audio and video
Netaji Subash Open University (NSOU)	√					Print, audio
Nalanda Open University (NOU)						Print
Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University (UPRTOU)	√	√				Print and video

*Source: Encyclopedia of Distance Learning, 2005*

*Annexure II*

**Questionnaire**

1. If you have any queries, you would like to interact through  
a. Website      b. Email      c. Mobile      d. Post      e. Others (Please specify)
2. Would you like to attend counseling sessions?  
a. Yes   b. No
3. Now that you have an idea of the type of counseling support provided by IGNOU, how would you like to be supported? (Please select all the alternatives and rate them in order of your preference; 1 means lowest preference – 5 means highest preference)

<b>Types of Counseling</b>	1	2	3	4	5
Face to face Counseling					
Edusat Based two-way interaction					
Interactive radio					
Teleconferencing					
E-learning					

4. In case you want to attend the counseling sessions, then your preferred days for attending counseling sessions  
a. Weekdays   b. Saturdays and Sundays      c. All days
5. Your preferred time for attending counseling sessions  
a. Morning      b. Afternoon      c. Evening      d. Night
6. Which pattern of counseling you would prefer?  
a. Synchronous (counseling provided at the same time as you study the topic, e.g. online counseling, two-way interaction)  
b. Asynchronous (counseling provided at a different time from your study schedule, e.g. Interactive radio, teleconferencing)
7. Which aspect of the course would you like to be covered in counseling?  
a. All topics   b. Difficult topics      c. Materials added over to that provided in print  
d. Project components   e. Others (Please specify)
8. Would you like to have job/placement related topics discussed in the counseling?  
a. Yes   b. No
9. Any other suggestions regarding counseling .....

## National Centre for Innovations in Distance Education

The National Centre for Innovations in Distance Education (NCIDE) at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Maidan Garhi, New Delhi, is an all embracing facility for promoting, supporting, engineering and disseminating innovations in Open Distance Learning/Education system. It is a ground for nurturing bright and inquisitive minds whose ideas and explorations are expected to revolutionize the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system and thus provide for transforming India into a learning society.

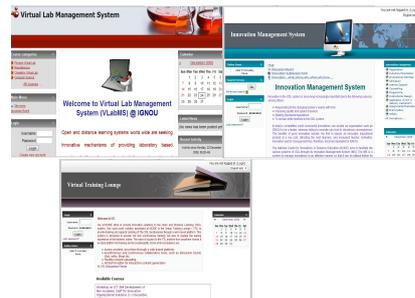
The goal of the Centre is to develop a culture of continued search for new and innovative solutions to issues and problems on the way of University's mission to offer seamless education across the various levels, achieve cost efficiency in its operations and provide borderless access to quality education and training.

To achieve this goal, NCIDE:

- promotes, develops and pilots innovations in all aspects of the ODL system and operates on the principle of Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) strategy.
- provides intellectual and technological support to the stakeholders for the growth and development of the ODL system.
- is a resource centre for prototype development that ensures quality assurance, cost- and learner-related effectiveness, and system efficiency.
- encourages innovations in distance education through collaborations within IGNOU and with other institutes in India and abroad.

### Activities

- Innovative Learning Solutions
- Research and Development
- Documentation and Dissemination of Innovations in ODL system
- Capacity building
- Collaboration and Networking
- Innovation Management



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