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Importance of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Assam: a Study with Special Reference to KKHSOU

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ABSTRACT

Education is important for all kind of people. Educated people can think and decide which one is good and which one is bad. To build a cultured society, every citizen should be well educated. According to Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam, "When education is purposeful, creativity blossoms and when creativity blossoms, thinking emanates. When thinking emanates, Knowledge is fully lit. When Knowledge is lit, Economy flourishes". In rural and remote area of Assam, till date superstitious believes like black magic, witch-hunting etc. are existing. Hundreds of innocent people were killed in such type of activities. As per report of All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2015-16, Assam has only 15 colleges against one lakh population. In such situation, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Assam is very important to educate each and every people of Assam. Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) is the only open university in Assam to convey quality higher education to doorstep to each and every household of Assam. We make a sample survey to study category, quality and different issues on the current learners of KKHSOU, so that a user friendly system may be built up and deliver which will help to educate all kind of people of Assam. In this article, we have tried to deliver the results of the sample survey to the readers through tables and statistical diagrams.

KEYWORDS: Education, Open and Distance Learning, Open University, KKHSOU

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INTRODUCTION

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system is the most popular arrangement by which people can upgrade their qualification at any time and from any place. People, who are deprived of higher education at their young age but wishing for improving their knowledge and qualification, can fulfil their desire by using Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system Mahanta, K. and Khataniar G. (2014)[1]. People those who live in rural, remote, mountainous and border areas can learn and gather knowledge using ODL system. It will provide the rural, remote and disadvantageous people an opportunity to educate themselves and do something for the greater interest of the society.

The aim of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University is to develop and provide easily accessible modes of quality higher education and training with the use of latest educational inputs and technology. It holds the promise of providing equality of opportunities for higher education and bringing into its fold the deprived and denied sections of people of the region. With a view to reaching out to those disadvantaged groups due to educational, economic, geographical or any other circumstances, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University has been formulating academic programmes to suit the less educated, educated and higher educated groups to achieve the goal of providing higher education and training at their doorstep making the fulfilment of the motto 'Education beyond barriers' Prospectus, KKHSOU (2013)[2]. Assam is the land of diversity. Geographically, economically, socially and politically, it is divided into various parts. Therefore problems of different learners are different depending on their place, background and other reasons.

The main objectives of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University are to provide access to higher education to large segments of the population and in particular the disadvantaged groups such as those living in remote and rural areas of Assam including working people, housewives and other adults who wish to upgrade or acquire knowledge through studies in various fields. Another notable objective of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University is to provide opportunities to the population, including those who could not pursue higher education in the appropriate time due to various reasons. This will also give an opportunity for physically challenged people and prisoners who wish to develop their professional skills and knowledge.

To fulfil the objective of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, development of robust machinery using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is needed which can touch each and every learners of KKHSOU. This will provide an educational environment to all kind of learners which will be helpful to gather their knowledge and share their resources. It may make

the University most popular, technologically advanced in education and IT sector and will be able to give all facilities to the learners in remote and rural areas Mahanta, K. and Khataniar G. (2014)[1].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prof. G. Ram Reddy, a distinguished scholar worked enormously on Open and Distance Learning in India and abroad. Prof. Reddy, the eminent educationist held many important positions which include Vice Chancellor of Osmania University, the founder Vice Chancellor of Andhra Pradesh Open University, presently known as Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Vice President of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the Chairman of University Grants Commission. He established and shaped two open universities bring the Open and Distance Learning prominent in India and abroad Garg, S. et. al.,(2006)[3]. Ramalingam S.(2005)[4] worked on Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and explores new technological change which is very essential to up-to-date information. He also offered some suggestions about some of the differences between tutoring open learners and supporting students working through conventional face-to-face programmes. According to him, facing up to the differences can make a radical difference as to how open learning tutorial is achieved. Jagannath V. K.(2003)[5] discusses about the trends in Distance learning and different Open Learning issues in recent times. He also argued the implications of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Distance Learning and the probable opportunities in Distance Learning. Selvam S. K. Panneer (2009)[6] had written a detailed report of the ongoing research in Distance Education. Choudhury P.(2008)[7] presents an overview of the advantages and characteristics of the various technologies of distance education now being used to teach the learners. Pathak C. K.(2003)[8] discusses an authentic in-depth analysis of contemporary situations, progress and challenges in the field of distance education. Bordoloi R.(2013)[9] discusses various challenges concerning higher education in India and also the quality of higher education. She also talks about transforming Higher Education through ODL with Special Reference to KKHSOU in Assam Bordoloi R.(2017)[10]. Bordoloi R. and Das P.(2015)[11] also worked on the application of ICT in Open and Distance Education. Sarmah B.(2016)[12] published an article on educational technologies of the 21st century and its essentiality to the practice of teaching in Higher Education. Chakraborty N. and Sarma G.(2014)[13], has studied and discussed with a reference of E-learning portal 'Bodhidroom' on understanding student perceptions in using E-learning portal as knowledge management tool.

To know the quality and basic need of the learners of KKHSOU, we find that a survey is necessary which will give the accurate picture of the situation. After review of literature, we discovered that it is important to collected data directly from the learners of KKHSOU by face to

face mode using questionnaire to make a user friendly Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based system which will help them to success in their respective courses.

METHODOLOGY

To know the overall quality of learners of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, a survey has been carried out using questionnaire. A structured and simple questionnaire is important to find out the best output of any research. Hence we have prepared the questionnaire based on Dichotomous Question (2007)[14] format to know the present situation of the learners of KKHSOU. Though various questions have been asked to the learners in the questionnaire, we have considered only few related questions for the analysis. We have selected two districts of state of Assam with some specific characteristics. Morigaon district, one of the semi urban district with minimum study centre of KKHSOU i.e. less than 5 study centre and Kamrup Metropolitan district the urban district with maximum study centres of KKHSOU, i.e. more than 20 study centres. We have selected both of the districts for our survey. Total 769 data have been collected from 14 different randomly selected study centres of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University. The sample included all categories of learners like Bachelor Preparatory Programme (BPP), Degree, Master Degree, Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed) programmes etc. Data have been collected from the learners in face to face mode filled in the questionnaire by their own hand writing and with full signatures.

The total number of 14 study centres of two selected districts of Assam, in which the survey have been performed are-

1. Kamrup Metropolitan district
    a. Dispur College (KKHSOU Study Centre code:1511), Dispur
    b. S.K. Hazarika College (1510), Zoo Road
    c. Karmashree Hiteswar Saikia College (1521), Six mile
    d. Paschim Guwahati Mahavidyalaya (1534), Dharapur
    e. Assam Institute of Advanced Studies (1506), Uzan Bazar
    f. Icon Commerce College (1503), Chandmari
    g. Cotton University (1501), Panbazar
    h. Bonda Anchalik College(1523), Bonda
    i. West Guwahati B. Ed. College (1520), Pandu
    j. Pragjyotish College (1502), Bharalumukh
2. Morigaon district
    a. Morigaon College (2001), Morigaon
    b. Lahorighat College (2101), Lahorighat

c. Jagiroad College (2005), Jagiroad

d. DIET, Morigaon (2004), Morigaon

LOCATION OF STUDY AREA
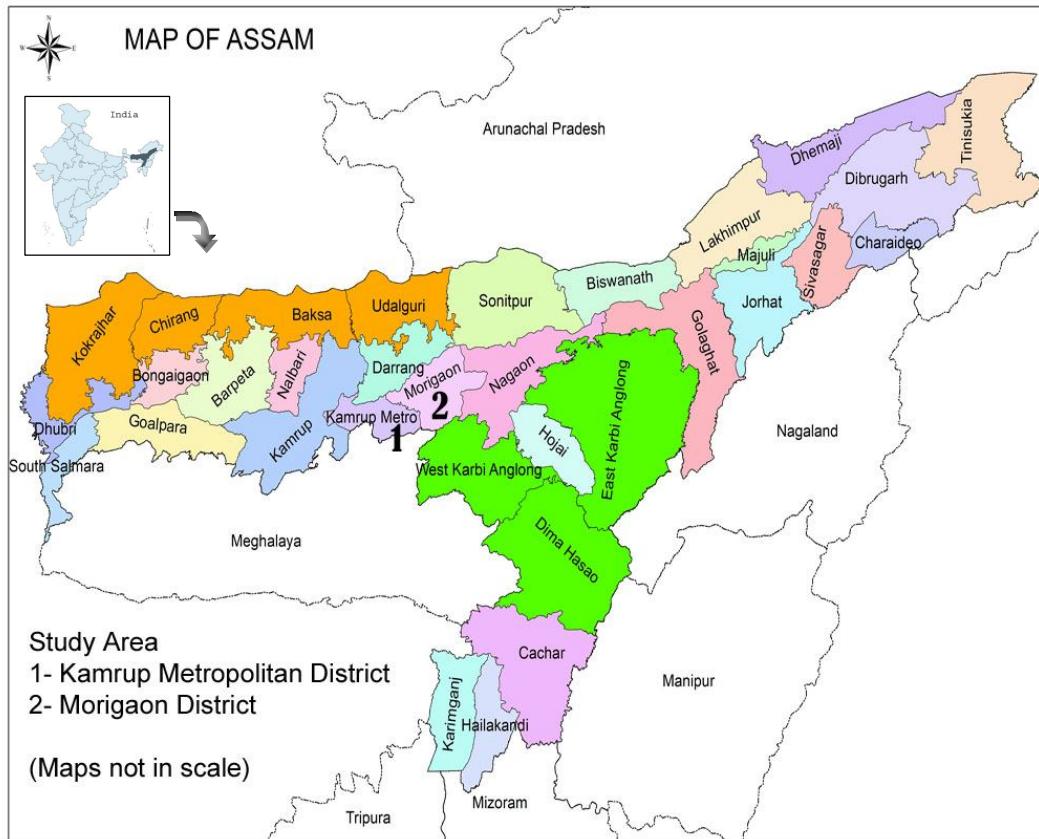
Source: Google images

Figure1. Location of the study area

## DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The data collected from the field i.e. survey data are processed with the help of SPSS software version 12 and MS Excel-2007. The following results found after analysis, which are showing using tables and suitable figures.

We tried to find out the age group of the sample and find a very good result which shows in table1.

Table: 1 Age group of the sample

|	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
below 25	114	14.8	14.8	14.8
above 25	583	75.8	75.8	90.6
no comment	72	9.4	9.4	100.0
Total	769	100.0	100.0	
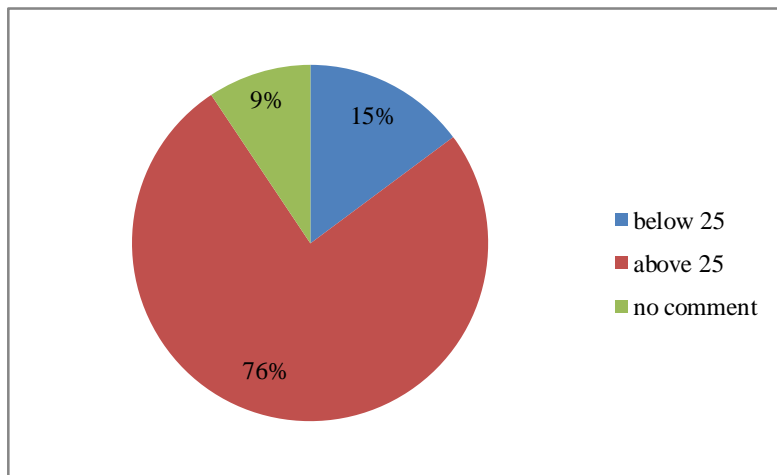
Graph.1: Showing different age groups, categorised as 'below 25' years and 'above 25' years of the sample

The age of a learner of 25 years and below is considered as below 25. Age limit is fixed in 25 years, as normally within this age a learner complete their education in conventional system. Figure 1 shows that 76% learners could not complete their education in their normal age due to various reasons. They got the opportunity to continue their education in KKHSOU.

Next we tried to find out the sex ratio of the sample and here also we find an excellent result which shows in table2.

Table: 2 Sex Ratio of the sample

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
male	335	43.6	43.6	43.6
female	403	52.4	52.4	96.0
no comment	31	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	769	100.0	100.0	
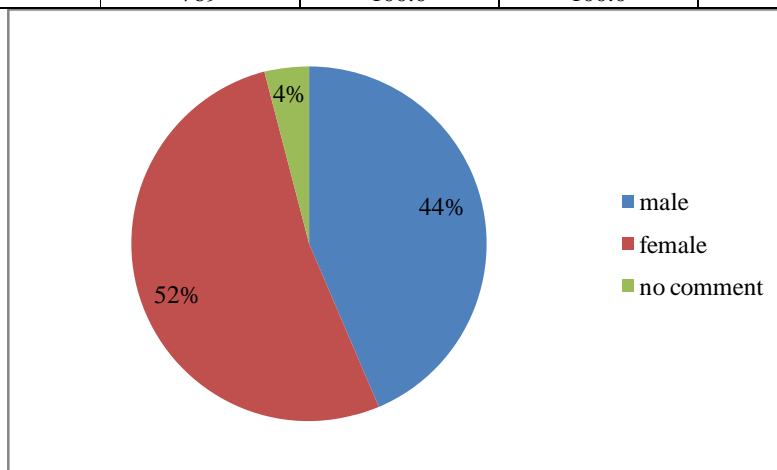
Graph.2: Showing percentage wise sex ratio, categorised as male and female of the sample

Figure 2 clearly indicate that the sample includes more female learners than male, which is a good sign. In rural areas of Assam, in the 20th century, after marriage female learners discontinue their study. They lost the opportunity to complete their study in the normal age. Such

disadvantageous female candidates like house wives and others got the chance to complete their study through Open and Distance Learning.

Table 3 shows that 97% of the total sample has their mobile phones. We can use mobile phone as a tool for delivering different course related materials and information to the learner, which must be the user friendly, up to date, technologically advent and anybody, can easily access it without any hesitation.

Table : 3 Having mobile phone of the sample

|	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
yes	753	97.9	97.9	97.9
no	12	1.6	1.6	99.5
no comment	4	.5	.5	100.0
Total	769	100.0	100.0	
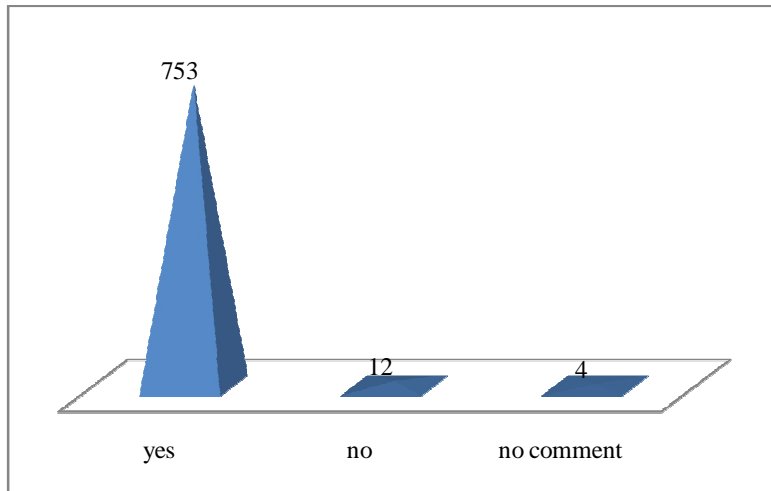
Graph.3: Showing the total number of sample (male and female) having their mobile phones

Next we have tried to find out the computer proficiency of the sample and we find a good result which shows in table4.

Table: 4 Sample know how to use a Computer

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
yes	428	55.7	55.7	55.7
no	297	38.6	38.6	94.3
no comment	44	5.7	5.7	100.0
Total	769	100.0	100.0	
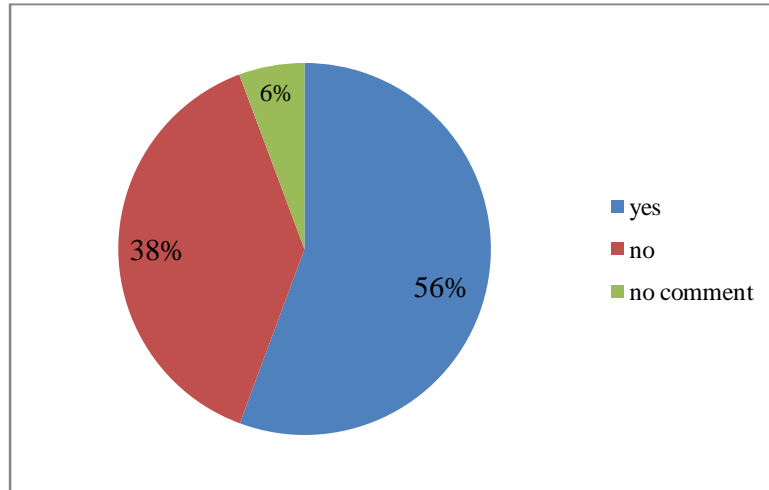
Graph.4: Showing whether the sample know how to use a personal computer (PC); In the graph 'yes' indicates they know how to use a PC

Nowadays learners are interested to learn how to use computers. In KKHSOU, in any programme, there is a compulsory computer paper, through which a learner can know the basics of computers. From our survey in figure 4, we find that 56% learner know how to use computers and hope other will also learn in the next semester syllabus.

Then we tried to know the reason, why the sample didn't complete their courses in conventional system, and we find the result as shown in figure 5.

Table: 5 Reason for not completion of course in Conventional System

|	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
tough syllabus	39	5.1	14.6	14.6
poor economic background	77	10.0	28.7	43.3
poor examination results	15	2.0	5.6	48.9
remote area	1	.1	.4	49.3
poor infrastructure	19	2.5	7.1	56.3
Others	9	1.2	3.4	59.7
All	63	8.2	23.5	83.2
no comment	45	5.9	16.8	100.0
Total	268	34.9	100.0	
Missing System	501	65.1		
Total	769	100.0		
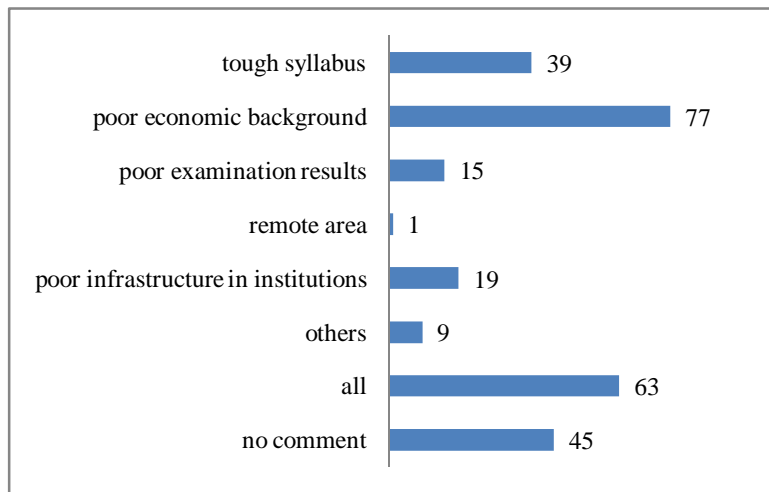
Graph.5: Different reasons for not completion of their regular course in Conventional System of the sample

Then our next question is why the sample preferred ODL and admitted in KKHSOU, and we get the result as shown in figure 6.

Table: 6 Reason of joining ODL

|	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Flexible admission	34	4.4	9.1	9.1
Flexible program	6	.8	1.6	10.7
Flexible curriculum	16	2.1	4.3	15.0
Flexible examination	9	1.2	2.4	17.4
Promotion in service	18	2.3	4.8	22.3
low fees	11	1.4	2.9	25.2
Good SLM	26	3.4	7.0	32.2
Convenient to attend on contact classes	6	.8	1.6	33.8
Working learner	13	1.7	3.5	37.3
Degrees are at par with conventional universities	7	.9	1.9	39.1
Scope for lifelong education	5	.7	1.3	40.5
others	1	.1	.3	40.8
All	190	24.7	50.9	91.7
no comment	31	4.0	8.3	100.0
Total	373	48.5	100.0	
Missing System	396	51.5		
Total	769	100.0		
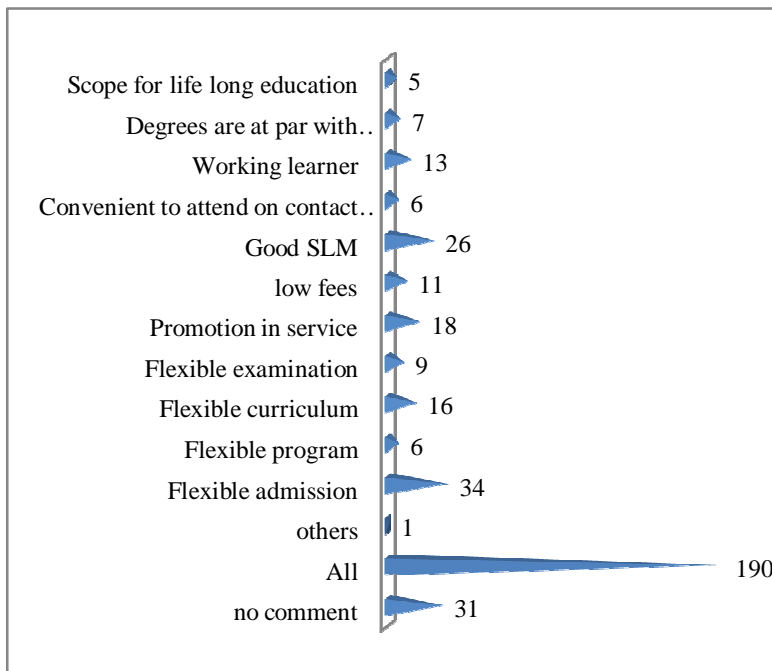
Graph.6: Different reasons of joining in KKHSOU, the ODL institute of the sample

We tried to know how many learners of the sample use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) launched by the university and we find a poor result which shows in table7.

Table: 7 Use of ICT by the sample

|	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
yes	192	25.0	25.3	25.3
no	403	52.4	53.0	78.3
no comment	165	21.5	21.7	100.0
Total	760	98.8	100.0	
Missing System	9	1.2		
Total	769	100.0		
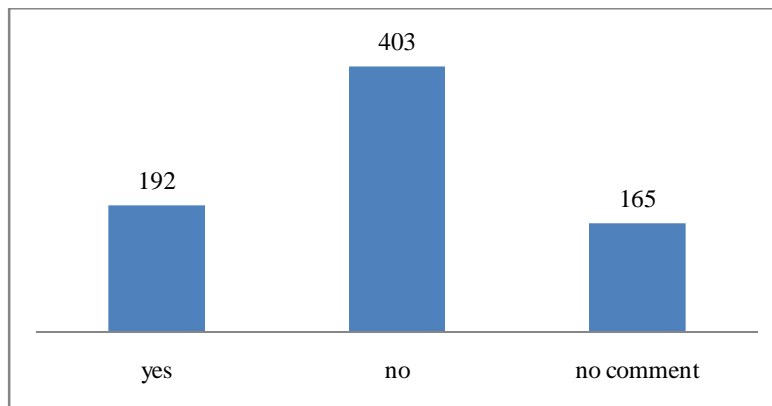
Graph.7: The numbers in the graph showing that the sample used / not used (yes/no) ICT launched by the university

From the table 7, it was found that only 25% of the total sample use ICT launched by the university. It is very sad that in Open and Distance Learning, ICT is the most important tool to deliver information and knowledge. It is important to think seriously how to popularise the ICT among the learners. A research to make popularise ICT among the learners of KKHSOU is needed immediately. This will make the university more successful related to these days.

Lastly we tried to know the interest to use of ICT programmes, if the university launch in a different way which will be user friendly, then we got the result which are showed in table 8.

Table: 8 Whether sample interested to use ICT?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
yes	545	70.9	71.0	71.0
no	104	13.5	13.5	84.5
no comment	119	15.5	15.5	100.0
Total	768	99.9	100.0	
Missing System	1	.1		
Total	769	100.0		
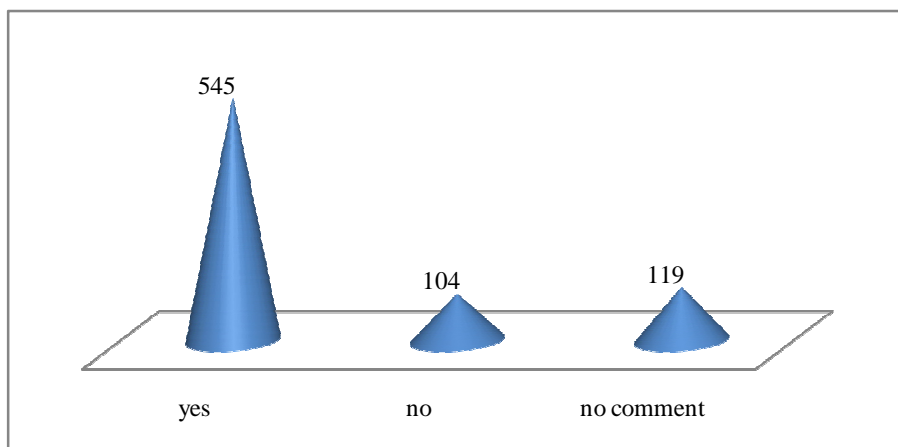
Graph.8: Showing the interest to use ICT by the sample, if the university launch in a different way which will be user friendly

Figure 8 shows that more than 70% learners are interested to use ICT but they could not do due to various reasons. We find that some learner don't use ICT due to afraid of it. Some learner don't use ICT due to not interested, some couldn't use due to non availability of Personal Computer, some couldn't use due to internet connectivity problems in their locality, some couldn't use due to they don't have time.

If we make a system which will be more interesting, user friendly for all category of learners, for all kind of locality like remote area of the region, then we easily go to each and every people of Assam to making the motto successful 'Education to the doorstep to all'.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

Nowadays Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system is becoming more and more popular to the people due to flexible admission, flexible program, flexible examination, good self learning materials (SLM) and hence it will be pursued by the any kind of people including working people. Due to the scope of lifelong education, anybody at any age can take admission. As degrees offered by such organisations are at par with conventional universities under University Grants Commissions (UGC), it will help for job and promotion in service. Physically challenged person, prisoners, house wives can also pursue programmes from their own locality without any trouble.

Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University is one of the premier organisation and the only open university in Assam provides various popular programmes for such learners. It also provides free education to the Prisoners and the Physically Challenged learners all over the state of Assam. Due to popularity, starting from 2008 to till 2018, total enrolled learners of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University is 3,47,354 (source: KKHSOU). Average about 31,500 learners enrolled in KKHSOU every year. These learners are spread all over the state.

This study was performed to know the different category of learners of KKHSOU, their problems and to find out their basic needs. We have seen that more than 97% of the sample has their mobile phones. Nowadays mobile smart phone is very popular and anybody can use easily. Peer-to-peer (P2P) networks are becoming more and more popular to share resources and information. So we should think to use mobile phone using peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing system to deliver different ICT programmes to the learners. Hope in near future Open and Distance Learning (ODL) will be the best option for admission for all kind of people in the society. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Regular Mode of Education will go parallel and make our society the best one.

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