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OPEN UNIVERSITIES: DISTANCE LEARNING FOR IT STUDENTS

The paper compares several open universities that offer distance courses of IT programs on three criteria. Based on these data, a survey was conducted among students of Siberian Transport University.

В работе проведено сравнение нескольких открытых университетов, предлагающих дистанционные курсы ИТ программ по трем критериям. На основании этих данных проведен опрос среди учащихся Сибирского государственного университета путей сообщения.

Introduction

With the advent of the twenty-first century for human civilization, a new era of development began - the era of the information society, which is characterized by the deployment of the latest information and telecommunications revolution, the rapid spread of information technologies, globalization of social processes, international convergence and multidisciplinary cooperation. A new global information and communication environment of life, education, communication and production, which is called the infosphere, is being formed. The organizational and technological basis of the information society is the global information networks, the core of which is the Internet. New conditions of social development require the training of new specialists, the use of new modern learning technologies that are adequate to the requirements of the information society.

The relevance of our work is determined by the fact that at present the traditional methods of education are complemented by new teaching methods based on the use of the Internet, electronic computer networks and telecommunications. In modern conditions, it becomes necessary to form a flexible distributed system of lifelong education, with which a person can have access to world information resources and databases, continuously improve his/her professional skills throughout life and which allows to be professionally mobile and creatively active. Flexible learning modes implicitly regulate the temporal and spatial frameworks for conducting classes and

communication between teachers and students. This allows teachers and students to plan their study time and learning process more flexibly.

Today, education is becoming individual and open to all. If you want to advance your knowledge and skills but don't have the formal academic qualifications to apply to a traditional university, why not consider studying at an open university?

Starting from correspondence education courses in the 1930s, distance learning has evolved into the dynamic and technology-driven world of online education – cited by many as the answer to time constraints, financial barriers and other obstacles to accessing education. In the past few years the distance education market has gained new attention thanks to the hype surrounding MOOCs (massive open online courses).

Distance education opens up a large range of programs to students who would struggle to attend lectures and seminars face-to-face due to responsibilities or time constraints, such as parents or full- and part-time workers. Students are able to work in their own time, often at their own pace, with all the resources they need available via the internet or as downloadable materials.

In the past, the main criticisms of distance learning have focused on its inability to compete with the support and interactivity provided by traditional on-campus programs. But with online communication techniques developing and internet connections in many places continuing to get faster and more reliable, the ease with which online university courses interact with and teach their students is constantly improving.

Today's distance education students may be able to watch video lectures, chat with teachers and fellow course-mates using forums and instant messaging, and download a wide range of reading materials and other resources. Some online education providers have increased levels of support by hiring more staff members to answer questions asked by online students, as well as nurturing peer support networks and monitoring courses to identify the points at which additional support or resources are most in-demand [1].

The delivery method of distance and online learning programs varies. Although many courses are conducted entirely online, some providers also give students the opportunity to meet face-to-face with tutors and classmates several times a year. This aims to give a more personable feel to the program and enables students to network, ask more in-depth questions and gain further professional and interpersonal skills.

In other situations, students will conduct all their work online and are only required to attend specific locations for exams. Others may attend weekly lectures in addition to completing work online; this combined system is known as blended learning.

In the last few years another type of online education has stepped in to the spotlight: MOOCs, short for massive open online courses. These are free online education programs that anyone can sign up to, typically offered by well-known universities, and now covering a huge range of subjects.

Along with the obvious advantages of not having to travel or take years out of work to complete a degree, there are even more benefits of studying online. These can include lower tuition fees and the freedom to study in your own time.

International knowledge-sharing is another benefit. Due to the fact that distance learners come from all walks of life and from any corner of the world, online education is often an incredibly global and diverse environment, bringing together students and tutors of many different nationalities and facilitating intercultural exchanges that often bring new perspectives.

There is also the potential benefit of learning in an independent and self-reliant way – but for those who struggle with self-discipline this may be more of a disadvantage. Other disadvantages can include the lack of face-to-face communication and lack of timetabled structure.

The relatively limited potential for networking may be a deterrent for some students for whom this is a high priority. And certain subjects that require regular access to specialized equipment and practical experience (such as engineering, natural sciences and medicine) are also less well-suited to distance/online formats [4].

The first European university to give students the option of open and online education was the Open University UK which was created in 1970. Since then, countries have gradually embraced this trend, realizing that students who don't fulfil all usual admission criteria should also get a chance to improve their education [1].

We compared several open universities that conduct distance learning courses on three criteria. Based on the information from the Internet resources, we made a comparative table 1[2,3].

Table 1. - Comparison criteria

Criteria	Southern Cross University	Royal Roads University	Humanitarian-Economic and Information-Technological Institute
Admission requirements	You only need to take one of these language tests (<i>TOEFL iBT</i> , <i>TOEFL</i> , <i>PBTIELTS</i>)	You only need to take one of these language tests (<i>TOEFL iBT</i> , <i>IELTS</i> , <i>C1 ADVANCED</i> , <i>PTE Academic</i>)	For high school graduates: USE For college graduates: the results of entrance examinations For applicants to the second higher: according to the results of entrance tests conducted through a regional representative in your city [3].
Tuition	1930 EUR/module	10 300 EUR/module	43200 ruble/module[3]
Course length	18 months	24 months	5 years[3]

Based on the analysis of theoretical sources, we conducted an empirical study, to find out how well students know about open university and distance education. The research tool is a questionnaire, implemented in the system of Moodle and consisting of four questions. The survey involved 149 students from different faculties Siberian Transport University.

Fig.1 show that 78% of students would like to get an education at an open university.

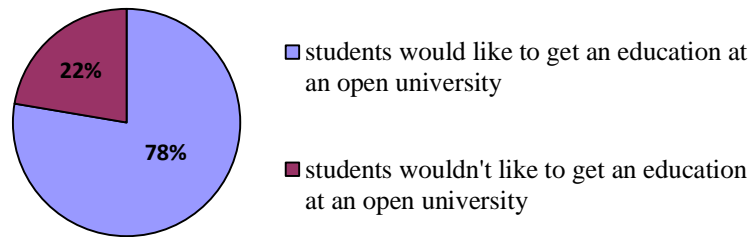


Fig. 1 Interviewed who would like and who wouldn't like to get an education at an open university

Fig.2 show that 42 % of respondents in choosing courses preferred the Computer Science & IT programs.

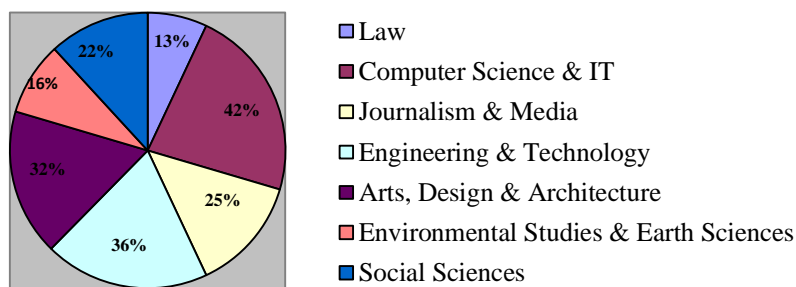


Fig. 2 Percentage ratio courses which students would like prefer

Fig. 3 show that 68% students think that open universities is a more convenient way to get education.

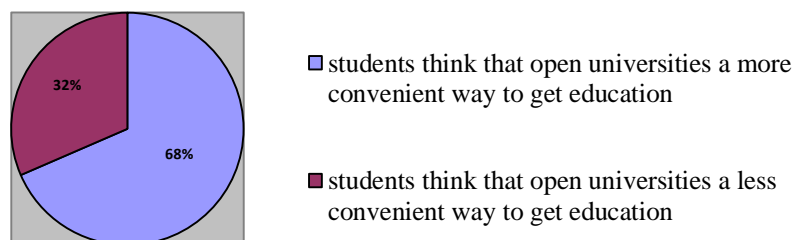


Fig. 3 Interviewed which think that open universities a more convenient way and less convenient way to get education

Fig. 4 show that 65% of participants think that open universities will be developed in Russia.

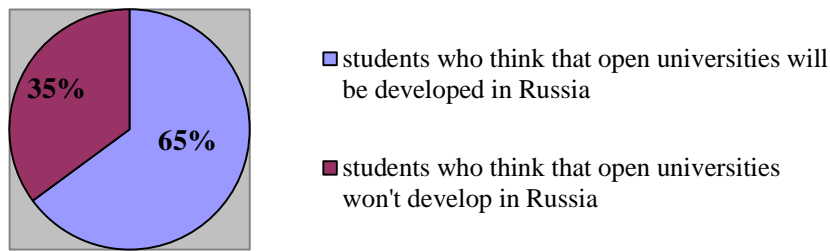


Fig. 4 Opinions of participants about the development of open universities in Russia

Thus, we can make a conclusion that open universities are a worthy analog of traditional education. At the same time, we found that not always "open" education can be financially accessible. Open universities are distinguished by the availability of quality higher education for everyone without formal and territorial restrictions. Open universities provide the opportunity to master the contents of undergraduate programs, and in the future - graduate programs.

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