

Activities and Development of Open Universities in the States of European

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Abstract

The urgency of the research lies in the possibility of providing educational services even in the crisis conditions of modern times, caused by geopolitical problems and the spread of the global coronavirus pandemic. The activities of Open Universities in the states of the European Union are characterized by openness and the possibility of providing complex educational programs according to modern pedagogical practice. The importance of Open Universities' activities is underpinned by the use of modern pedagogical methods, namely: distance education and interactive classes. The issue of applying the European education system of Open Universities is crucial to the possibility of improving the population's general educational level and contributing to the enhancement of the population's qualifications in EU states. The purpose of the academic paper is to study the principles of activity and aspects of the development of Open Universities in the states of the European Union. The objectives of the research are to analyse the functioning of Open Universities, define the educational program and outline the prospects for further development. The object of the research is the factors of activity and development of open universities in the European Union's states based on modern digital technologies. By using the methods of scientific research, both exploratory and analytical ones, an assessment of the activities of Open Universities in European countries was carried out. The research methodology consists in the analysis of theoretical and methodological approaches to the Open University as an educational institution and conducting a study of the prospects for the development of Open Universities in the countries of the European Union. The results obtained can be used in practical training of students for their subsequent admission to higher educational institutions and improving the process of developing a complex of educational programs in Open Universities. The academic paper examines the principles and factors of the development of Open Universities in the countries of the European Union.

Keywords: university, pedagogy, distance education, Open University, education system, educational practices, educational approaches, entrance score, assessment system

1. Introduction

Under current conditions, the development of education is the key basis for building a future career and raising the social-economic standard of living. The features of educational services in the world market remain at the conservative level of teaching, traditionally fulfilled through universities and schools; however, gradually, the activities of universities are transformed in accordance with the needs of the world and geopolitical conditions. An open university is a necessity for improving the qualification level of knowledge and skills of the society. Nowadays, the issue of developing the necessary skills for the labour market is a key advantage. Such events were the result of global scientific progress and the rapid digitization of social-economic activity. In the modern world, the demand for new professions and skills and abilities that will be competitive in the labour market is increasing. The development

of Open Universities in the states of European Union is aimed at overcoming the shortage of personnel and carrying out a number of socially important functions in order to provide a higher education program to everyone interested, regardless of age, article, race or religious identity. The issues of promoting the development of activities of Open Universities of the European Union' states play not only a social role in improving the qualifications of Europeans, but it is also directly reflected in the economic and corporate climate. The training of human capital will stimulate the improvement of the population's working quality and the formation of a competitive European labour market, which is an important strategic task on the world stage. The rapid development of the USA and China prompts European countries to search for relevant ways of training their own specialists and creating a flexible education system that will function in the conditions of the spreading the coronavirus and political and social problems, such as the war in Ukraine. The significance of using educational tools such as an Open University in state programs will be able to qualitatively increase the level of economic well-being in the labour market, overcome unemployment and create a reserve of qualified labour force. With the help of Open Universities, various learning technologies are implemented, which are used mainly in the form of distance and extramural education. This is precisely why the issue of improvement and development prospects of Open Universities is facing European countries. Along with this, in order to strengthen the general environment of educational services, it is necessary to implement foreign experience in providing these services. Scholars debate whether distance education is effective and, in general, whether an Open University can provide a comprehensive, high-quality education like a traditional university does. The use of innovative systems and wide access to educational services create prospects for overcoming negative social fluctuations in the labour market and standard of living. An important issue in the activity of Open Universities is the use of current pedagogical practices and programs.

2. Literature Review

The research issues are widely discussed in scientific circles, forasmuch as it is on the basis of approaches to the development of the European education system that the future of the labour market will depend. In addition, the accessibility of the population to obtaining higher education remains an important issue. According to the scholar's viewpoint (Gardin, 2018), higher education will become less and less accessible and the cost of education will continue to rise. An Open University is an excellent opportunity to obtaining the relevant higher education in the chosen speciality at an affordable price or for free. The scientist (Schofer, 2021) pays particular attention to this problem; he sees the features of the prospects for the development of higher education through the emergence and improvement of the functioning of Open Universities in the countries of the European Union. The author considers that the main problem is the imperfection of the higher education system and the necessity to transform it to more modern requirements of the labour market, which will qualitatively improve the population's general level of education. In addition, the development of Open Universities is facilitated by negative social consequences, such as: the impossibility of access to higher education and the lack of material support for obtaining it. As a rule, an Open University is much cheaper, and sometimes free of charge, than any private or in some cases the public one. It is with the help of Open Universities, according to the viewpoint of the scholar (Liao, 2018), that the development of education takes place. The institution's high multiculturalism and convenient schedule create a quality environment for exchanging experiences (Bakhov, 2014). Moreover, in order to achieve academic success, there is a transparent assessment system that affects the quality of knowledge acquisition by students. It becomes possible to study not only for representatives of European countries, but also for foreign students who are looking for an opportunity to obtain quality and affordable education (Holovaty, 2014). The Open University mainly operates on the basis of distance and extramural learning mode; as noted by the scientist (Marhasova, 2020), this contributes to an increase in the motivation of learning and saving time. Most of the Open Universities of the European Union have a low threshold for entry; actually, everyone interested has the opportunity to study at a prestigious higher institution with the opportunity to get a quality education (Kostiukevych et al., 2020). However, there is a fair amount of applicants, which makes it necessary to introduce a minimum competition. The authors (Aucejo & Ramirez, 2020) emphasize that the activities of Open Universities should become a strategic priority for the development of Europe in order to obtain scientific, technical and economic advantages. Human capital, which is created with the help of Open Universities, can significantly overcome personnel hunger and increase the efficiency of the corporate sector of European countries. An important debatable issue, according to the standpoint of scholars (Lezhebokov, Sergodeeva, 2020), is that an Open University should carry out its activities on the basis of modern technologies; however, there are problems with the imperfection of the teaching system and high-quality material. Along with this, the majority of Open Universities in Europe have excellent equipment, which increases the quality level of educational services (Sculley, 2010). Open Universities are involved in international exchange programs that allow students to travel,

share knowledge and culture, and open doors for learning. Through the implementation of exchange programs and a number of international programs, Open Universities have created a reliable brand in terms of the quality of their activities and hold leadership positions among universities in the world. The importance of an individual approach, according to the scientist (Shalimova, 2020), is a key advantage of Open Universities, because despite the high level of distance education, every teacher is interested in the academic success of his students. Such approaches to pedagogical activities improve the quality of education and stimulate the acquisition of knowledge and improvement of analytical and research skills and abilities. The scholar (Kalantzis, 2020) believes that Open Universities are the way of future multicultural science and the achievement of humanity. The author notes that international cooperation and wide access to an Open University can settle not only social problems, but also stimulate the solution of a number of issues in scientific disciplines. Thus, the specifics of the activity and development of Open Universities in the European Union's states are a widely debated issue, and it requires constant monitoring.

3. Research Goals

The purpose of the research is to analyse the activity and development of Open Universities in the countries of the European Union and to outline the key prospects for the formation of an effective education system in the world market. The importance of an Open University in countries facilitates the spread of education opportunities for low-income categories of the population. In addition, the objective of the research is to determine the main forms of interaction with students and the characteristics of educational processes.

It is important to use modern innovative and digital technologies in the implementation of educational activities. The issue of using quality pedagogical practices to improve students' analytical and mental abilities is also considered.

The academic paper investigates the key principles of university development and activity in the states of the European Union. The priority direction of the research is the ways of development of the Open University in European countries.

4. Materials and Methods

In the course of the research, a number of scientific methods were used, which made it possible to outline the main results. By applying the methods of analysis, the development features of future universities in the states of the European Union were determined and the qualitative aspects of their development were outlined in accordance with the labour market policy. The method of deduction and induction was used in order to carry out the description of the theoretical and methodological aspects of the formation of Open Universities and the tools that contribute to strengthening their positions in the educational market of the global space. The characteristic features of the activities of Open Universities were identified, and the system of education based on key programs in the universities of the European Union was analysed. With the help of the grouping and statistical method, the key training programs for the modern corporate world were characterized and the future demand for specialists on the market was predicted. Important aspects of the development of Open Universities on the market and the quality of the teachers' pedagogical activities were studied by applying the synthesis method. The study was conducted on the threshold for admission to an Open University and existing international programs that contribute to the reputational and educational component of an educational institution. The method of abstraction made it possible to determine qualitative approaches regarding the use of educational practices of students during their studies at Open Universities in the European Union's states. In addition, the importance is underpinned by the development of new technical specialities, as well as differences in demand for certain professions in the market, which can qualitatively improve the university's activities and strengthen its position in the global market of educational services. The competitive advantages and disadvantages of Open Universities in the European Union were determined by the method of analysis, and the ways of solving this problem were characterized by means of analytical synthesis.

The methods used during the research characterize the features of the activity and development of Open Universities and possible prospects for their further enhancement in accordance with globalization challenges. Approaches to the analysis of the functioning of an open university are based on the world's most effective teaching methods.

5. Results

Currently, the rapid emergence of Open Universities in European countries facilitates the need to search for actual means of solving the problem of a possible shortage of personnel on the European labour market. Most scholars adhere to a unified meaning regarding the definition of an Open University. An Open University is an institution of

higher education that provides education services through distance and extramural learning mode, and the entrance threshold there is minimal. It is based on this approach that the essence of the activity of the Open University and the possibility of its use in the huge market of educational services in the European Union's states is formed. It should be mentioned that the Open University is not free of charge, although it contains some elements of discount for students from all over the world. In addition, the issue of tuition fees for each program is not uniform, and it may constantly differ from market offers (Cope, 2020). It is on the basis of such approaches that a high-quality system of diversification of universities and the programs they train should be implemented. Currently, there are more than 40 Open Universities of the global scale in Europe.

The main priority goal of the Open University is the training of educational personnel all over the world. Everyone interested is able to join the training and improve his practical skills. It is precisely for this purpose, such educational universities create a competitive environment in the market of educational services. By applying qualitative approaches to education, it is possible to introduce and implement the relevant training methods that are traditionally used in such universities.

Despite the low threshold for admission to an Open University, it is not free of charge, which is the key disadvantage of such a university. For instance, the majority of public universities in Germany are free. The entrance exams are of increased complexity, however, the student does not pay for the education, and only the student fee is required. There are no more additional tuition fees. The student fee depends on the sections attended by the student, as well as the general policy of the university; as of 2021, the amount of student fees did not exceed 600 euros.

Most universities in Poland have a system of discounts for different categories of the population and even nationalities. For instance, Polish universities offer a discount of up to 50% on tuition for Ukrainians who come to study at a Polish university.

In Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, most universities operate either completely free of charge or have minor student fees. As a rule, in the Scandinavian countries, great attention is paid to sports; therefore, student fees are directed mainly to the purchase of special equipment, which provides an opportunity to create competitive positions in the sports segment.

Having identified the key factors regarding the development of private and public universities in the European Union, the question arises: what is the advantage of Open Universities? First of all, open universities have a much simpler admission procedure; they require a free package of documents, not clearly regulated by the education system, but determined privately by each university (Kychko, 2021). For instance, it is enough to have an international passport and a document about any education obtained (even private in special schools) or attending training, and you have the opportunity to be enrolled.

On the one hand, this approach is qualitative in terms of accessibility to learning; on the other hand, the question arises whether students who have had no education in general or poor academic performance level will be able to have the potential for the chosen discipline and its possible mastery.

Let's consider the key advantages and disadvantages of Open Universities in European countries in Table 1.

Table 1. Advantages and Disadvantages of Open Universities

Advantages	Disadvantages
Broad access to audiences and students from around the world	It is not free of charge, it costs much more than the state ones
The opportunity to provide advantages of collective work and implementation of real projects	Distance education excludes live communication in real life
A system of individual approach is used	The market of universities is insufficiently popular in the world
Low threshold for admission	It is necessary to constantly improve the education system in the market of educational services
Effective for teaching both elementary and senior specialists	The lack of a unified grading and assessment system; each university actually uses its own grading system.

* Source: compiled by the author

As we can see, the advantages and disadvantages of European Open Universities contain significant aspects regarding the functioning of the educational position and the cost of education. For instance, an Open University is

much more accessible, but it costs significantly more than universities in other countries.

Students choosing an Open University are guided by the need to improve their own classification, because the university has no age requirements. Everyone interested is able to learn. Most of these universities enrol people from management positions and insurance or technical specialities. Studying at the university can improve not only the theoretical component of comprehending the subject, but also increase the ability to understand the subject itself in general. This is the priority task of an open university, as well as improving the skills and abilities of people who have applied to study there.

A separate aspect of the university's activity is collective activity and solving projects that are closest to real life. Solving real world problems can improve not only the quality of education, but also contribute to the general elevation of the person studying in it. It is with the help of such a system that it is possible to create an effective method of teaching activity.

In the countries of the European Union, there is a wide community of such universities, and each of them has its own direction, which emphasizes its attention on a specific discipline. However, the main tendencies in the modern world are learning digital technologies, programming, working with data. Medicine has become an important additional segment that appeared during 2019-2021. It is the problem of spreading the coronavirus pandemic that has become a key aspect of the European medicine development in order to optimize the search for its financing. In particular, most universities in the world have implemented their own measures that make it possible to improve the functioning of teaching the medical education and strengthen its influence on the foreign market. In addition, during the war in Ukraine in 2022, the need to improve military practices and information technologies have acquired of particular importance. The majority of Open Universities in European countries have the management direction as a key program, which is caused by the shortage of personnel in any segment of specialization. Let's consider in more detail the features of European Open Universities, their characteristics and approximate tuition fees.

Table 2. Characteristics of the Top 10 Open Universities in Europe

University	Characteristic	Tuition fee
Wageningen University and Research, the Netherlands	There is a system of distance education, collective classes are used, and it contains a number of programs of management, economics of medicine.	Between 500 and 2,500 EUR per academic year
Freie Universität Berlin, Germany	Distance education system, using management as a key direction.	9,500 EUR per academic year
Stockholm University, Sweden	Distance education and collective work in groups, individual classes. The key direction is information technology.	Between 0 and 13,000 EUR per academic year
Trinity College Dublin, Ireland	The highest priority is given to technical disciplines.	Between 3,000 – 11,200 EUR per academic year
University of Oxford, the UK	Distance education and a wide range of services.	Between 1,800 – 29,000 EUR per academic year
European University Cyprus	Distance learning mode and individual classes. It also has an offline class mode. Main directions: management, economy, banking.	Between 8,500 – 13,500 EUR per academic year
EU Business School, Spain	A university with modern teaching practices. It includes distance and offline training modes. The main directions are tourism, management, insurance and information technology	Between 12,900 – 29,850 EUR per academic year
Swiss School of Business and Management, Switzerland	The most popular university for studying the basics of business and management. It provides distance education, and it uses leading information technologies.	Between 600 – 20,000 EUR per academic year
International Telematic University UNINETTUNO, Italy	Distance education. The university prefers international economics and diplomacy.	Between 2,500 – 4,000 EUR per academic year
Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL), Belgium	A university offers a wide range of disciplines: pedagogical, humanitarian, technical and applied ones. Distance education prevails.	Between 2,000 – 19,000 EUR per academic year

* Source: compiled by the author according to the data of the “distance learning portal” publishing house

The outlined characteristics indicate a shortage of management personnel, as well as a wide range of prices in the countries of the European Union. From such standpoints, the most relevant and important is the possibility of international exchange programs and participation in university activities, which can simplify access to education for countries with low wages. It is through the implementation of such approaches to the functioning of Open Universities that it will be possible to provide quality tools for improving its influence on the global student community and create a competitive position with Open Universities in the USA and China (Wang, 2019).

The issue of the participation and influence of China and the USA is of great importance to the European markets. Most of them have better facilities and teaching methods, which have created a tendency for the outflow of key personnel to the American and Chinese markets. In a strategic sense, this approach to the development of the labour market and workforce will have a negative impact on Europe's scientific potential. Therefore, European universities should collectively create conditions that will retain their specialists and stimulate them to complete the educational program within their program (Zvirbule, 2020). However, participation in international programs will be able to increase the brand of the university in the international arena and improve the demand for distance education in the leading universities of the European Union.

The problem of spreading the global coronavirus pandemic, as noted by (Sarkodie, 2021), has caused the transformation of traditional education into distance education; let's consider this dynamics in Table 3.

Table 3. The Level of Implementation of Distance Education in European Countries

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Poland	50%	54%	78%	89%
The Netherlands	52%	56%	74%	83%
Spain	43%	48%	72%	80,5%
Germany	51,5%	56%	76%	84%
Switzerland	54%	55%	77%	81,6%
Italy	56%	58%	81%	84%

* Source: compiled by the author based on the analysis conducted

During 2018-2020, the level of distance education of about 50% is observed in the universities of the countries and Open Universities of the European Union's states. However, spreading the coronavirus has caused a number of educational transformation processes, which already reached 70% in 2020, and 80% in 2021, respectively; such data indicate the rapid digitization of education and the need to introduce elements of distance learning. Most universities provide educational services in a mixed format, with partial distance education mode and a traditional one.

The development of Open Universities of European countries is based on using modern digital technologies, which is the ground for the development of the progress in the modern world and will be able to improve the stability and security of the national economy. The issue of developing the modern practices of teaching information technology and management as a key tool for compiling and managing the project should become the highest priority for the European Union's states.

The concern of learning digital technologies is based not only on mastering these disciplines, but also on using them during your studies. It is the special digital technologies used in leading European universities that can improve the quality of its activities and create a competitive position on the world market.

As a rule, the university prefers technology that can accelerate the pace of learning, develop students' analytical abilities, and is able to reflect the real progress of students in their studies. The modern tools of education in Open Universities are in more detail reflected in Table 4.

Prospects for further development of European Open Universities are ambiguous. On the one hand, they do not have state funding, which eliminates the possibility of reducing the cost of education. Therefore, two key concepts should become an important issue regarding their functioning.

The first concept: open universities require a permanent and high-quality source of funding. They can be found according to their specialization in the corporate sector. For instance, a university that teaches information technologies may enter into a number of agreements to finance and secure students as future employees for an investor company. Thus, mutually beneficial conditions for market activity will be created.

Table 4. Modern Tools of Education in Open Universities

Technology	Characteristic
Media design	Opportunities of using video materials during training and implementation of a wide library of media files
Online lectures and workshops	Conducting online lectures and workshops by means of improved communication – specially created systems for the requirements of the university, with the possibility of registration and exit. There is no use of out-dated technologies such as Google Meets, etc
Robotic testing	Using the software while taking tests or passing exams is a key learning advantage. The program indicates possible errors or credits your answer if it is correct. In some universities, there is usually only one answer attempt
Special simulators	Using digital simulators help improve your skills at any convenient time, when a person is the most productive
Social communications and the scientific community	Truth is born in discussion. Most Open Universities are guided by this principle forasmuch as it encourages working in groups and implementing projects as a whole group. This approach improves team abilities and forms the necessary analytical competencies for future work
Interactive and non-standard classes	There are many practices of conducting an interactive class, and each Open University has its own. It is with the help of their implementation that cognitive activity can be improved

* Source: compiled by the author

The second concept: Open Universities should quickly introduce such disciplines as military art and information technology into their teaching activities. The issue of European security is a crucial one as of 2022, caused by the war in Ukraine. The statistics regarding the most popular disciplines in the European space testifies to the fact that military art actually occupies the last places in the list of disciplines.

Therefore, the importance of the development and activity of Open Universities in the European Union's states contain a number of features related to the technology of their operation and the possibility of qualitative development in the long term. Subsequent studies should be aimed at optimizing the activities of the university and the priority disciplines being taught there.

6. Discussion

The results of the study indicate the necessity to improve and strengthen the educational system of Open Universities in the countries of the European Union. Despite the significant advantages of the university, it is worth improving the system of distance education and access opportunities for the global community of students. The issues regarding the effectiveness of the implementation of interactive lessons, the formation of innovative practices of pedagogical activity at the level of the educational process remain open. The main objective of the further activities of European states' Open Universities is to overcome the shortage of personnel hunger. The war in Ukraine has caused a high migration of students to European higher educational institutions. In addition, talented students from various low-income countries migrate to European universities; however, in the long run, their amount may not be enough to cover the labour market in Europe, which requires an optimal system of Open Universities.

Foreign scientists (Zalite, 2020) believe that an important direction for the activities of Open Universities is the introduction of education based on digital technologies; after all, the necessity for knowledge and the possibility of using modern technologies provide competitive advantages in the labour market. Mastering digital technologies becomes easier and more accessible by applying innovative practices and the possibility of improving the educational process. There remains a tendency towards a low threshold for admission to Open Universities in the European Union's states; however, with the increase in demand for educational services in the world, it is necessary to create a wider system of university institutions that are open to students from all over the world.

Other authors (Zvirbule & Grinberga-Zalite, 2017) characterize the Open University as a tool for spreading the European culture of the educational process. Argumentation of such positions is carried out using the methodology of European countries. Along with this, according to the authors' standpoint, cooperation with China and the USA could significantly improve the European experience of training qualified workers. Moreover, the authors emphasize the need to develop internal human resources and give preference to pedagogical practices aimed at forming a person's digital abilities and improving the use of digital infrastructure.

Ukrainian scientists (Kholiavko & Dubyna, 2019) note that Open Universities of the European Union conduct good theoretical and practical training of future specialists. Their main priority is the development and strengthening of international training programs and their impact on the international environment. This issue remains open for discussion. The authors lay emphasis upon conducting joint scientific studies by both European and Ukrainian researchers, which can improve the level of communication between the primary communities of the scientific world's representatives and create channels for further interaction.

The research results on the existing problematic aspects regarding the implementation of the activities of Open Universities have been obtained; however, the issue of further development of educational processes in the European space still arises. Implementation of effective pedagogical practices and opportunities to encourage students towards engagement in research activities can improve analytical skills and enhance overall proficiency in the chosen discipline.

Prospects for subsequent studies consist in determining effective teaching methods and implementing a system of expanding university activities not only to the European contingent, but also creating and spreading international communication programs. An important direction of further research is the functioning and cooperation of the European Union's Open Universities with the USA and China, which will qualitatively increase the level of education. By the way, an important direction is also the study of possible influence of non-standard workshops and lectures and the level of people's interest in education. The European Union's states should enhance and strengthen the brand of "quality education" that has become established in the modern world.

7. Conclusion

Thus, a number of conclusions can be drawn from the conducted research regarding the functionality of open universities in the states of the European Union. Firstly, an Open University is an educational establishment operating under a simplified admissions system and providing wider opportunities for distance and extramural education to compare with state or private universities. Secondly, the education system of open universities is based on using modern technologies, which is determined by qualitative approaches to the implementation of educational programs; it strengthens the general perception of educational processes both on the European domestic market and on the foreign market. Thirdly, the goal of the Open Universities' activities is to implement an effective method of improving qualifications and creating a labour force reserve in the long term, which can solve the problem of personnel hunger and strengthen the scientific and technical potential of Europe.

Open Universities are a widely debated issue in the scientific community due to the constant transformation and change of the education system. There is no clear unified viewpoint on the tools applied in training activities. The lack of such a mechanism creates alternative approaches to training and the implementation of interactive, non-standard seminars and lectures, which are effectively reflected in the students' performance level.

The issues connected with activity and development of Open Universities in the European Union's states also fulfil the social functions of raising the level of the population's education and providing access to the possibility of building one's own career through modern education and skills in demand on the labour market. Such approaches create a competitive educational environment for the European Union in the global labour market, despite significant migration processes caused by geopolitical processes and crisis trends.

The main fundamentals of the research were the use of modern pedagogical technologies and digital infrastructure in teaching. Distance learning is the key educational tool of the future; therefore, it is necessary to develop and improve it, forasmuch as it will allow improving the level of access to educational processes and creating the most high-quality and competitive educational environment.

The process of development of Open Universities in the European Union's states is directly related to the labour market, forasmuch as it determines global trends and promising professions of the future. In order to ensure the personnel potential of future professions, it is necessary to conduct large-scale training of the European countries' population and increase their scientific potential.

Therefore, the conducted research characterizes the basic principles of the development of Open Universities and provides access to educational services for the society. Prospects for further studies are important in the direction of cooperation between Open Universities with China's and the USA's establishments, as well as the use of innovative pedagogical methods.

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