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1. Form a professional committee to thoroughly study the open university system of education, initiate dialogues amongst the right scholars, policymakers, and educationalists to form a shared vision, and come up with an academic plan for the establishment of private and public open universities,
2. Prepare rules and regulations for acceptance and recognition of globally accredited open university degrees, which include both online and distance education strategies and
3. Prepare bylaws for establishing government and private open universities and pass them by the relevant authorities for implementation.

- DL works best with older students who have consistent technology access at home and will work responsibly on their own. However, DL does have a clear advantage when unexpected school closures occur.

## **V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

Open education is becoming ever more critical than normal education globally, and digital technologies are one of the main driving forces behind education modernization. The use of digital technologies for teaching and learning has spread through all types of institutions, including open universities. It supports the modernization of higher education globally, as it is primarily carried out via digital technologies. It links non-formal and formal education once recognized and accredited.

An open university system of education, despite having its pros and cons, helps students to overcome barriers to education such as cost, time, location, and admission requirements and provides a flexible condition for the learner, who can at the same time continue their jobs and take care of their family responsibilities in countries like Afghanistan. One can study at their own pace with open universities and, in the end, obtain the exact qualifications they can receive from on-campus university courses. In conditions similar to Afghanistan, where female students face educational barriers, open universities are the best fit to help them pursue their higher education in specific fields and meet their responsibilities at home for most of their time. The credibility of open universities varies drastically, and students can get admission to any of them after checking their accreditation and credentials to ensure their degrees are valid for finding jobs in different countries. In Afghanistan, open universities must function parallel to regular universities to strengthen higher education and provide more baccalaureates with higher education opportunities.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

Strengthening higher education is a requirement for social and economic development, not a desire to limit it to privileged society groups. Therefore, it is recommended that the Ministry of Higher Education undertake the following steps in establishing Open University system of education in the country to expand and develop higher education for all in the country:

Open universities function with an open-door academic policy with minimal or no entry requirements, employing specific teaching methods and strategies, mainly online learning and distance education, which includes correspondence of resources.

Selection of the teaching strategies depends on the needs of students; for instance, online learning is helpful in normal situations, while distance learning is best for older and employed students with consistent technology access and all in volatile conditions. This is because online learning cannot be as useful as distance education when unexpected academic program closures occur. Teaching resources can include;

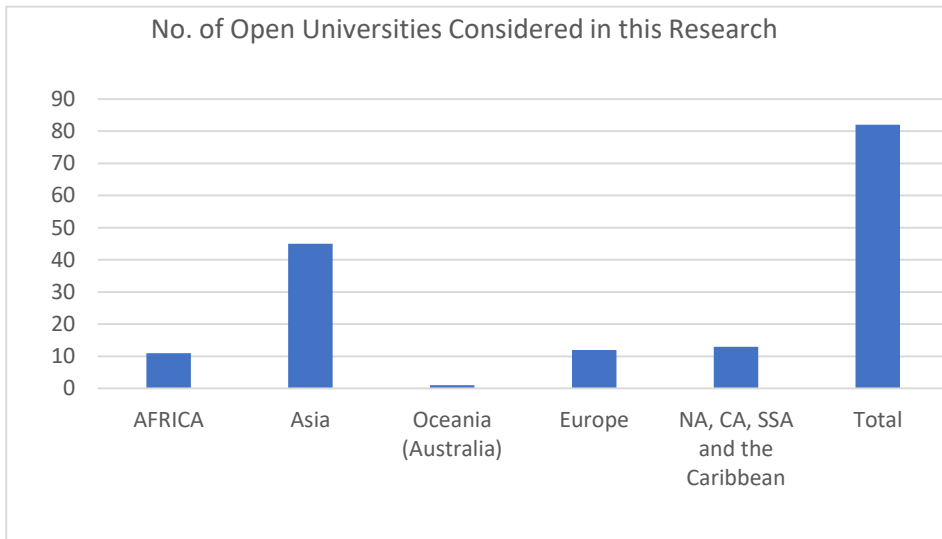


Figure 1: No. of OUs in each continent

- A digital curriculum is a good fit to fulfill students' needs for both of the strategies,
- The curriculum could be developed according to the requirement of a learning plan and designed in a time-saving way.
- The digital curriculum could be selected as per the guide.
- Hard copies of the teaching material and books could be provided using postal services in case of distance learning.

Both the OL and DL education have a place in education. One can work better depending on social, educational, and political needs. For instance;

- OL works best for middle and high school teachers who want to provide different ways for their students to learn.

Table 4: Drawbacks of Online Learning and Distance Learning [1]

		<b>Teaching Strategies</b>	
<b>Description</b>	<b>Online Learning (Sometimes called eLearning)</b>		<b>Distance Learning</b>
	<b>Disadvantages</b>	It relies on regular student access to technology in school; otherwise, its implementation gets tough. It brings up many concerns about screen time in the classroom. Students may cheat when using digital tools.	Not usable if students don't have access to devices or the Internet at home. It makes it challenging to keep tabs on whether students are working. It can result in even more screen time for your students. It can make cheating even more accessible than online learning.

#### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The literature review and rough analysis of open universities' initial figures show that the open university education system is getting popular globally, and its number is increasing considerably in Africa, Asia, America, Europe, Oceania, and Australia.

The outcome of a simple mathematical analysis of Open University figures from all the continents is summarized in Table 5 below and illustrated in Figure 1 below.

*Table 5. OUs in each continent*

<b>Continents</b>	<b>Total No. of OUs</b>	<b>Percentages of Total</b>
AFRICA	11	13
Asia	45	55
Oceania (Australia)	1	1
Europe	12	15
NA, CA, SSA, and the Caribbean	13	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100</b>

It shows that open universities are popular on all continents, most of which are in Asia. This increase is probably because open universities offer an open-door academic policy, enroll students without asking for evidence of previous education, experience, or references, and assist students in overcoming all educational barriers related to time, location, cost, admission requirements, etc. It conveys that Asian people face more severe academic challenges and obstacles than those on other continents.

### 3.3 Advantages of Online and Distance Learning

Both OL and DL are considered viable and effective teaching strategies, with distinct advantages for both teachers and students, summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Advantages of OL and DL Educational Strategies [1]

Teaching Strategies	
<b>Description</b>	<p><b>Online Learning (Sometimes called Distance Learning eLearning)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- increase student engagement when used as part of a blended learning technique.</li> <li>- Blended Learning involves using different instructional resources and teaching methods to deliver content in multiple ways.</li> <li>- It makes it easier for instructors to differentiate teaching instruction.</li> <li>- When using tools like digital curriculum, one will have more flexibility and control for differentiating lessons without putting in extra time during evenings and weekends.</li> <li>- It saves instructors' time with planning and grading as many digital curriculum tools do the heavy lifting for teachers by providing ready-to-use lesson plans, instructional materials, and assessments.</li> <li>- Many online learning tools also automatically grade those assessments and post them to the teacher dashboard.</li> </ul>
<b>Advantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It has its unique benefits compared to online learning.</li> <li>- It can continue without disruption, even during snow days or the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> <li>- No types of interruptions don't affect your classes in the same way as traditional in-person classes.</li> <li>- It allows students to work at their own pace and review work as needed.</li> <li>- The students can access course material at the times that work best for them, which is important for students with irregular work schedules.</li> </ul>

### 3.4 Disadvantages of Online and Distance Learning

OL and DL rely on digital resources, but both have similar drawbacks, as summarized in Table 4 below.

led the research to a conclusion. The collected data about open universities in different parts of the world are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Finding of Statistical Analysis of Open Universities in Different Continents [1]

S.N.	Name	Type			Teaching Mechanism		
		Public	Private	Unknown	DL	PC	Unknown
1	AFRICA	7	4	0	9	3	1
2	Asia	38	5	2	24	29	7
3	Oceania (Australia)	1	0	0	1	0	
4	Europe	9	2	1	11	6	1
5	NA, CA, SSA, and the Caribbean	7	6	0	11	6	2
GRAND TOTAL =		62	17	3	56	44	11

The information collected shows that open universities have an open-door academic policy with minimal or no entry requirements, employing specific teaching methods and strategies, mainly online learning (OL) and Distance Learning (DL), each with advantages and disadvantages.

### 3.2 Differences Between Online Learning and Distance Learning Strategies

Online Learning and Distance Learning are the two teaching strategies involving students working on computers or devices, which are similar online learning tools with some differences. There are three significant differences between online and distance learning, as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Differences between Online Learning and Distance Learning [1]

Differences	Teaching Strategies	
	Online Learning (Sometimes called eLearning)	Distance Learning
Location	working through their digital lessons and assessments in the class.	Working online at home, the teacher assigns work and checks in digitally.
Interaction (depending on location)	in-person interaction between students and teachers as it is used as a blended learning technique along with other teaching strategies.	No in-person interaction between teachers and students; only rely on digital forms of communication such as video calls, discussion boards, and your college's learning management system (CMS).
Intention	to be used in combination with other in-person teaching methods as a supplement to provide a variety of learning opportunities.	It is a method for delivering instruction solely online, not as a variation in teaching style.

In the Soviet Union in the late 1950s, Nikita Khrushchev significantly extended higher education using a system of correspondence courses with part-time education, in which millions of students took part while remaining in the workplace and becoming useful functionaries of society. With the break-up of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, the state no longer needed the cadre of functionaries, and the system collapsed [6].

The first European open university was the Open University in the United Kingdom, which was established in 1969 to widen access to the highest standards of scholarship in higher education; it uses a variety of methods for teaching, including written, audio, and visual materials, the Internet, disc-based software and television programs on DVD. Course-based television broadcasts by the BBC continued until December 15, 2006 [7]. The National University of Distance Education (UNED) was established in Spain in 1972. Its distance learning model provided higher education for those excluded from the existing catholic establishments. It was a national university and had a government-imposed curriculum [6].

The Open University of the Netherlands is an independent government-funded university founded in 1984. It uses various methods, including written materials, the Internet, and occasional evening seminars or day sessions. This university has study and support centers dispersed throughout the continental Netherlands, study centers in Dutch-speaking Belgium (Flanders), and partnerships with different institutions. Open education is a core value for these institutions; they are not just secondary offshoots from more traditional universities.

### **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This descriptive desk research is conducted using the information collected from books, literature, and the internet and through informal discussions with university professors and professionals.

#### **3.1 Data Collection**

Relevant information, facts, and figures about the history and number of open universities in all African, Asian, American, European, and Australian countries and education strategies were collected with a focus on the provision of an overview of open universities, their reach, and the educational strategies used as teaching mechanism in these universities globally, analyzed the information using simple mathematics and, which



## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Open University

The European Commission defines open education as a way of carrying out education, often using digital technologies, intending to widen access and participation for everyone by removing barriers and making learning accessible, abundant, and customizable for all. It offers multiple ways of teaching and learning, building and sharing knowledge, and provides various access routes to formal and non-formal education and connects [1]. It goes beyond open educational resources (OER) and open research outputs to embrace strategic decisions, teaching methods, collaboration between individuals and institutions, recognition of non-formal learning, and different ways of making content available.

An open university is a university with an *open-door academic policy*, with minimal or no *entry requirements* [1]. Open universities may employ specific teaching methods, such as *open-supported learning* or *distance education*. However, not all open universities focus on distance education, nor do distance education universities necessarily have open admission policies [2].

### 2.2 Open-door Academic Policy

An *open-door academic or open-door policy* is one where a university enrolls students without asking for evidence of previous education, experience, or references. Universities may not employ the open-door policy for all their courses, and those that have a universal open-door policy where all courses have no entry requirements are called *open universities*. The policy is sometimes characterized as a part of an educational revolution [1].

The history of open universities goes back to 1858 when the University of London's External study system welcomed anyone from anywhere in the world who could meet its entry requirements and pay the requisite fees. In this university, participants could continue to earn a living while they studied, learn in any way they wished, and sit their examinations without visiting Britain [3].

A few other older open universities to be named could be the Royal University of Ireland–1879, the University of the Cape of Good Hope, which later became the University of South Africa, 1873, etc.

the need for exploration of an appropriate system of education to help female students continue their studies. The assumption is that the Open University education system is one of the best solutions for the aforementioned unexpected problems. This research has been undertaken to strengthen higher education in the country through understating of open university education system, reviewing and studying the needs and possibilities of establishing open universities for the first time in the history of higher education of the country, and its prose & cones to assist the nation to continue their higher education effectively for future social – economic development.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

This research focuses on finding a solution to the following question to strengthen higher education to help the young generation continue their learning process despite unexpected, challenging circumstances such as COVID-19, political changes, restrictions on students of different ages, gender, weather conditions, and economic hardship and employment:

Can open university education systems and online and distance education strategies help give the nation higher education opportunities?

### **1.2 Research Objectives**

The following objectives are set for this research to find the answer to the research question stated above:

- To understand the Open University System of Education,
- To know about the role of online and distance education strategies in relation to open universities, including the advantages and disadvantages of both, and
- To highlight the needs and existing opportunities for creating and implementing open universities in Afghanistan.

The findings of this research will help in understanding the open university system of education, the need for its creation, and opportunities for its implementation, which can prevent possible future suspension of higher education and can ultimately strengthen higher education in the country, as well as provides opportunities to help the people of different age and gender to continue their higher education along with their employment, or staying at home.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is a lifelong process requiring continuous efforts and modifications for further development. The history of the past half of a century in Afghanistan and the world shows that progress and continuation of the education process are prone to experience multiple challenges.

Strengthening and developing higher education compatible with the country's conditions to acquire the necessary knowledge to meet social, economic, and political needs for development is an unavoidable requirement of society and population.

### 1.3 Problem Statement

Afghanistan's higher education has experienced multiple challenges during COVID-19 and frequent political changes in the government, which have slowed the pace of higher education and lowered the effectiveness of higher education, leading to considerable delays in the learning process. As a result, universities were closed for one or two semesters, and the universities were pushed to follow a trimester system instead of two semesters per year. The higher education authorities, universities' management team, leadership, and professors tried their best to prevent possible delays in the education process by intensifying their teaching process. The Ministry of Higher Education planned and started the implementation of so-called Online Education (OE), sometimes Distance Learning (DL), blended learning (BL), or Electronic Learning (EL), which are different education strategies applicable under other circumstances with additional requirements.

Past experiences in the country show that those graduates who complete their education via online distance learning programs with international universities outside the country faced problems in getting their educational documents attested as the Ministry of Higher Education's relevant authorities and commissions do not recognize these types of education, and normally reject them in general and for academics in particular.

Currently, girls' education in Afghanistan has been halted, and relevant authorities are working on providing the appropriate condition-friendly environment for girls to attend schools and universities. It is believed that the current universities' educational conditions are not conducive for girls to participate in universities under co-education programs, which shows



# Evaluation of the Possibilities of Creating Open Universities in Afghanistan

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## Abstract

Development of higher education compatible with the conditions of each country in order to acquire knowledge is an avoidable necessity for the socio-economic development of societies. This qualitative and quantitative desk research describes the type of open universities, discusses the online and distance learning education strategies, evaluates its effectiveness in strengthening higher education, and justifies the feasibility of its implementation under current circumstances in Afghanistan. By presenting a clear picture of a few randomly selected open universities, different relevant teaching methodologies are explained, and the questions of this research are formulated to meet the needs of the day to strengthen higher education in the country further. This research findings highlight the need to establish open universities and their advantages as a new component in the Afghanistan higher education sector and recommend its establishment and implementation.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Development, Open University, Distance Learning, Online Education

## په افغانستان کې د پراستي پوهنتونونو د جوړولو د امکاناتو ارزونه

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## لنډيز

د هر هیواد د شرایطو سره په مطابقت کې د پوهې د لاسته راوړلو او د ټولني د ټولنیز-اقتصادي پرمختګ لپاره د لوړو زده کړو پراختیا اړینه ده. دا څېړنه یوه د میز تر شاه څېړنه ده چې د پراستي پوهنتونونو ډولونه بیانوي، د آنلاین او لیرې زده کړې ستراتیژيو په اړه بحث کوي، د لوړو زده کړو په پیاوړتیا کې د هغې اغیزمنتیا ارزوي، او په افغانستان کې په اوسنیو شرایطو کې د هغې د تطبیق امکانات توجیه کوي. په دې څېړنه کې د یو څو تصادفي غوره شویو پراستي پوهنتونونو د روښانه انځورونو په وړاندې کولو سره، د تدریس د بیلابیل میتودونو په تشریح سره د دې څېړنې پوښتنو ته ځوابونه ویل شوي دي چې په هیواد کې د لوړو زده کړو د لا پیاوړتیا په موخه د ورځې اړتیاوې پوره کولی شي. د دې څېړنې موندنې د افغانستان د لوړو زده کړو په سکتور کې د یوې نوې برخې په توګه د پراستي پوهنتونونو د جوړولو اړتیا او د هغوی ګټې په ګوته کوي او د هغې د جوړولو او پلي کولو وړاندیز کوي.

**کلیدي اصطلاحات:** لوړې زده کړې؛ پراختیا؛ خلاص یا پراستي پوهنتون؛ لیرې زده کړه؛ آنلاین زده کړه