ENGLISH ESSAY

THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF EDUCATION THROUGH OPEN UNIVERSITY

Brainstorming:

Strengths of open university:

1- More accessible to students from rural areas.
2- Flexible duration
3- Cost effective
4- Supportive for working ~~or~~ people job holders.
5- Technology enhanced learning

Weaknesses of Open University:

1- Problem of internet connection in rural areas
2- Limited interaction and lack of networking.
3- Lack of self discipline and motivation.
4- Full time concentration on screens
5- Health issues in students mainly because of computers

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Strategies to overcome weaknesses:

1- Provision / Access to internet connection for maximum students to access the material for each subject
2- Workshops must be conducted monthly classes for student-teacher interaction and to solve the problems
3- There must be clear guidance and strict rules to follow for both, teachers and students for discipline and management.
4- The university admin. must follow the completed SOPs and implement the program learning outcomes to strengthen the system.

Outline:

1- Introduction:
i) Thesis statement: The open universities offer unprecedented

oppurtunities for the people who would otherwise have limited access to education but it also have some weakness that can be eliminated by addressing to the challenges faced by open universities.

2- Strengths of Open Universities:

(i) ~~More~~ accessible to students from rural areas

(ii) Flexible duration of lectures

(iii) Cost effective

(iv) Diversity in content via internet

(v) Supportive learning environment

(vi) Synergy and high quality communication.

3- Weaknesses of Open Universities:

(i) Limited access to ~~resources~~ or study m

    (a) financial issues

    (b) Illiteracy

(ii) Limited interaction and social networking

(iii) Lack of self-discipline and motivation

(iv) Problem of internet connection

(v) Health issues in students

    (a) full-time concentration required.

4- ~~Conclusion~~ of essential online qualities

4.1-Way forward to Overcome challenges:

(i) Access to internet must be free for all students.

(ii) Workshops must be conducted quarterly.

(iii) Clear guidance and strict rules must be implemented based system

(iv) Program learning Outcomes, must be the basis for evaluation. implemented

5. Conclusion

(comparative analysis can also be given)

THE ESSAY :

Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world. Nelson Mandela. This quotation emphasizes the importance of education. The rapid evolution of internet has reduced the challenges of traditional education system, via open universities. Open universities refers to a specific type of educational institution, typically a public educat university, that allows students to enroll in course and programs without traditional admission requirements. These universities offer virtual programs unlike other traditional universities and helps students in accessing the content whatever, wherever they are, at any pace. Some of the marvellous of advantages of the open universities are easy access to learning content for students from rural urban areas as well as from rural areas, flexible duration of lectures, low cost programs and tutorials, diverse content via internet, supportive learning environment, synergy and high quality communication. These However there are some disadvantages too such as poor availability of internet, less interaction, lack of motivation and discipline, lack of quality education and health issues. but This essay discusses these strengths and challenges and suggests way forward to overcoming these challenges.

First and foremost advantage of the open universities is that these are more accessible to all students from worldwide. Any person, can enroll in the course of his choice and access the course curriculum from anywhere in the world This allows many students who cannot enroll in the traditional universities to access the resources which is not possible otherwise. such as those living in the rural areas. or those with disabilities In Pakistan one of such universities is Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) where courses are offered and degrees are conferred in several disciplines in humanities and sciences to those who cannot access higher education due to distance

with much more depth

financial barriers or simply work. Online learning via open university thus helps us to bridge the gap between public and private education.

Education via the Internet can be a game changer. Second advantage that open universities offer is the flexible duration of lectures for a particular course thus enabling the student to listen to the lectures whenever he has time and at his own pace. Unlike conventional learning mode with time constraint, this system provides virtual learning via courses tailored to meet the specific needs of each student. Passive exercises of listening to the lectures during class and making notes at speedily in short course of time are replaced with audio or video instructions, which offers the students to record, stop or pause the video until mastery over a topic of interest has been achieved. Similarly, the courses offered have lecthures that can be segmented into eight-to-twelve minute videos, representing a separate concept for clear understanding, thus removing the constraints of conventional classrooms. According to an average human attention span of 15 minutes, these digestible chunks allow students to traverse the materials in several different ways depending upon their background, skills or interests, thus allowing for better absorption of knowledge.

Third advantage offered by open universities is that these are cost effective. These have low tuition fees as compared to traditional universities that offer the same course for the same duration but with very high tuition fee which is not affordable for most of the students. Since Pakistan is a developing country with its economy not so strong, most of the people here belongs to middle-class families with only one or two breadwinners of one home, which makes the education for the children very difficult for the children to access these highly paid courses or degrees offered by the traditional universities.

Likewise, according to the report of UNESCO, 25 million children in Pakistan — 63 percent being girls, are not enrolled at any institution of study. This ranks our country second behind Nigeria in the line of nations where youth are not afforded the opportunity to academically train and develop suitable skillsets. In this course, open universities prove to be a miracle which enables those students to get the same course and degrees as offered by conventional universities in affordable prices.

Forth advantage of open universities is that they are a source of diverse content over the internet. The students can participate in group projects, access to research papers in their specific domain and can get their questions answered without any constraint. Like in conventional universities, the students have to ask for teacher for their availability and they have to be available for the teachers, there is no such restriction in an open university. The participation of students in group projects and online interactions give unprecedented insights into a student's learning patterns or interactive behavior. Similarly, they offer supportive learning environment. The students can ask whenever they have ambiguity without having the fear of bearing criticism like in traditional classrooms. This helps student to and motivates them to clear their concepts more easily.

Last but not the least, synergy and high quality communication is also the advantage offered by open universities. This format allows a dynamic interaction between the instructor and students and among the students themselves. Resources and ideas are shared, and continuous synergy is generated throughout the learning process. Each individual can contribute to the course discussions and comments on the work of others. This system also allows the students to reflect on comments from others before responding or moving to the next item — enabling the students time to articulate responses with much more depth and forethought than in a traditional face-

to-face discussion situation where the participant must analyze the comment of another on the spot and formulate a response or otherwise lose the chance to contribute to the discussion. The synergy that exists in the student-centred virtual classroom is one of the most unique and vital traits that the online learning platforms - open universities possesses.

Coming Open universities also have weaknesses which are discussed next. First and foremost disadvantage of the open universities is that students have limited access to the resources required for a virtual learning process. ~~The students as previ discussed are~~ mostly ~~from~~ middle class families, ~~donot have laptops or computers where they can join their online sessions. Either they donot have it or if they have their system are~~ one not compatible with the latest softwares requirements needed for the degree programs like computer science, information technology, software engineering. ~~This limits the learning~~ of the student whether they have interest ~~is that~~ particular domain. or not. Thus financial issues is the leading demerit in the education through open universities since traditional universities of have distinct labs ~~for~~ dedicated to these specified programs and degrees with access to all resources. Similarly, illiteracy is also a leading cause in limited access to resources for students. According to a report, the current literacy rate of Pakistan is 62.3% which means that an estimated population of 60 million is still illiterate in the country. ~~Thus th~~ Due to

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this factor, most of the people dont even know about the latest trends in technology and hence ~~are not~~ updated cannot access the suitable resources

Second, weakness in education through open universities is because least interaction and networking. Since a well-known proverb is "man is a social animal"; ~~good references~~ universities donot allow face-to-face interaction between teacher and student. Students can learn a lot from being in the company of their

peers. However, in an online class, there are minimal physical interactions between the students and teachers. This often result in a sense of isolation for the students. In this situation, it is imperative that other forms of communication between students, peers and teachers are allowed. This includes online messages, emails and video-conferences that will reduce sense of isolation but still is at a disadvantage of not having face-to-face interaction. One example is of a medical teacher teaching his students the process of doing ECG surgery on zoom class. He has to set the camera such that it is clearly visible to all students but is it effective? No, the students would not be able to learn as effectively as they can in a lab designed for the teaching. Thus a drawback to open universities.

Third disadvantage is the lack of self discipline and motivation in a student as well as the teacher. The students, in the online sessions in open universities often subject to demotivation and self-indulgence. They record the lectures or do not even listen to them - being online, and just sit around to pretend. Unlike the traditional classrooms, where the structure is provided by scheduled classes and direct oversight by instructors, online learners are primarily on their own. While beneficial for some, this autonomy can be a significant hurdle for those who struggle with self motivation or organization. Procrastination and distractions are common challenges, potentially leading to poor academic performance.

Problem of internet connection especially in rural areas and underdeveloped areas is fourth weakness in education system amongst open universities. Dependence on technology is a double-edged sword in online learning, while it enables access to education for many, it also creates barriers. Reliable internet access, compatible devices and basic technical skills are prerequisites for online learning, which can exclude individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds or those living in

areas with poor internet connectivity. Technical issues like software glitches, connectivity problems and appropriate terms good concerns can disrupt the learning process and cause frustration. COVID-19 pandemic shifted the whole learning process to online mode - this breakdown led to the closure of all educational institutions. As the shift occured, there was a lot of frustration since there was no proper management between the classes and the curriculum. Since the tutors didnot have the guidance and p necessary resources and tools to conduct online classes, this posed a challenge in education through open university. this posed serious challages

Fifth, the leading challenge in the way of online education is the health issues - Online classes affect the mental health of students, parents and even the teachers. The newly wired term during covid era was called "Zoom fatigue" referring to the feelings of exhaustion after long zoom classes or video conference calls. The information overload and facing the screen for prolonged periods is mentally draining. Separating home life from class time, not following a routine challenge schedule, and the distractions at home make it difficult for students to concentrate well in their classes leading to pressure, anxiety and stress to both students and their parents. Online learning not only affect the students but also teachers as well. The professors teaching online have years of experience inside the classroom but using technology devices may not have been their best asset. Teachers have additional workload to ensure the quality education to their students and also delivering the lecture for prolonged hours three to four hours is tiring for them. Thus leading to stress and anxiety. Experts recommend that

people should only spend two hours looking at the screens each day. However, because of online learning, many people have to spend the whole day looking at the screens for work or university. This can be damaging to our health.

Although there are some disadvantages or weaknesses in education system through open universities but those can be overcome by making ensuring free access to the internet enabling students f especially from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, to participate fully in online learning. tq TO solve the internet connection issues, the government must take initiatives, partnerships with telecommunication companies or subsidized internet access programs. In such course, Special communication organization has established and introduced internet connection in Gilgit Baltistan. Secondly, workshops provide valuable hands-on experience and interactive learning opportunities. By conducting these workshops, open universities can enhance student's practical skills, foster collaboration and provide personalized guidance. Thirdly, clear guidance and strict rules help maintain academic integrity, ensure fairness in assessments and create a conductive learning environment. Thus, ensuring this will prevent plagiarism and cheating. Finally, implementing a project-based learning system offers numerous benefits including, promoting critical thinking, problem solving skills and real-world application of knowledge. This system will encourage students to explore the topics deeply aligning well with flexible and self-directed nature of open university education. By incorporating these strategies, open universities can address the challenges in education effectively, promote inclusive learning opportunities and empower students to succeed in their academic pursuit.