

## Examining Openness in Mega Open Universities in the Context of Institutional Communication Management

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### ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this research is to ascertain the manner in which higher education institutions offering open and distance education incorporate the concept of openness into their vision, mission, core values, and tactics. This study employs a descriptive research design to ascertain the current state of affairs. The research methodology employed in this study involves document analysis. The study used a purposive sampling technique for the selection of participants. The key factors for purposive sampling are the existence of purpose, vision, core values, and strategic plans for the year 2018 and beyond, as well as the geographical diversity of the universities, as shown on their respective websites. In this study, we conducted an examination of the vision, mission, core values, and strategic plans presented on the websites of 13 colleges. The data collected from these sources was subsequently analyzed using the content analysis method. The present study aimed to analyze and elucidate the notions of vision, mission, and core values as depicted on university websites, utilizing frequency values. Furthermore, it has been ascertained that the notion of openness in the strategic plans of the institutions was delineated through 10 distinct themes, each encompassing several claims. The identified themes encompass various aspects of openness within the educational context. These themes include "openness in pedagogy and open admission policies," "openness in stakeholders," "openness in technology," "openness in management-governance," "openness in sustainability," "openness in social contribution," "openness in research," "openness in global competition," "openness in ethical issues," and "openness in future predictions."

**Keywords:** Openness, Institutional Communication and Open and Distance Education

### INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era characterized by the prevalence of information and internet-based technologies, the incessant and expeditious evolution of information has undeniably exerted an influence on institutional frameworks, elevating the significance of communication inside these establishments. The significance of communication in open and distance education institutions, which facilitate the rapid and transparent dissemination of information to a large audience, necessitates a collective approach rather than relying solely on the efforts of an individual or department. Consequently, in order to effectively accomplish the institution's aims and objectives, it is imperative to generate the requisite information and proficiently administer the resulting information through appropriate communication strategies.

Institutional communication is a discipline concerned with communication and relationship management, encompassing various domains that seek to enhance institutional performance in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. Its ultimate goal is to transform the institution into one that is well-regarded and embraced by society (Kadıbeşgil, 2012: 159). The successful implementation of communication management within an organization relies on its ability to effectively strategize and execute plans aligned with its predetermined philosophy and goals. The identification and implementation of successful institutional strategies are crucial for ensuring the sustainability of an organization's competitive position within its relevant industry. Additionally, these strategies play a significant part in shaping the organization's overall success.

Through a comprehensive analysis of pertinent scholarly sources, it has been established that strategic planning serves as a valuable instrument for institutions, particularly in the higher education sector. This tool effectively

assists these institutions in formulating their own strategic plans, anticipating the competitive landscape within their respective environments, and strategically positioning themselves accordingly (Chen et al., 2014; Vural & Bat, 2013). Hence, it may be posited that the philosophy, vision, mission, fundamental values, and tactics of an organization serve as manifestations of the collective culture inside said organization. In essence, it can be posited that with the implementation of institutional communication management, organizations strive to consistently and interactively convey their adopted culture to all stakeholders, thereby augmenting corporate performance through the cultivation of a unified image and identity. From this perspective, it is crucial to ascertain the methods employed by Open and Distance Universities in ensuring the sustainability of their human, technological, and financial resources through the implementation of a participatory and strategic management model. This is particularly significant within the framework of fostering the philosophy of "openness", as it allows for an assessment of the present state and the formulation of a future roadmap. It is crucial to ascertain whether the influence of openness, which offers adaptable learning by prioritizing the learner, necessitates a novel educational paradigm and fresh learning proficiencies presently and in the future, as posited by Chen et al. (2014).

### **OPENNESS IN INSTITUTIONAL COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGIES**

Institutional communication is a management function that is deliberately and instrumentally utilized by organizations (Cornelissen, 2004: 20). It encompasses a planned and applied approach within the realms of management communication, organizational communication, and marketing communication. Organizations effectively convey their core principles and beliefs to their intended recipients through institutional communication. The significance of the philosophy and mission of organizations becomes prominent in this context, as they serve as useful tools for elucidating the purpose of the organizations, delineating their objectives and undertakings, and cultivating a favorable perception in this regard (İçel, 2004:11). Management communication is a significant aspect of institutional communication, as it offers a strategic framework for connecting the vision and mission of a company with its strategic objectives (Steyn, 2003). This framework facilitates the formulation of the organization's vision, mission, strategic plan, long-term goals, and policies, which collectively establish the trajectory of the organization. Hence, the formulation of a institutional strategy within the context of management communication holds significant importance for the organization.

Institutional strategy refers to the strategic decisions and actions undertaken by an organization in order to fulfill the requirements and expectations of its stakeholders (Tokgöz, 2012: 35). The utilization of institutional communication strategies serves as a means to effectively attain the objectives of a business entity (Seitel, 2011). Currently, the primary focus for organizations in achieving effective communication with their target audiences is to ascertain the vision, mission, and goals of the organization and afterwards engage stakeholders in alignment with these objectives. Hence, the institutional communication strategy is intricately connected to the overarching objectives and extent of the organization, with the aim of fulfilling the diverse expectations and requirements of various stakeholders.

The examination of the idea of openness has been a subject of analysis within the realm of higher education for an extensive period of time. The notion of 'openness', initially examined at the UK Open University, was delineated as 'being receptive to individuals, locations, approaches, and concepts'. The facets of 'openness' were commonly examined within the context of 'open admissions' (Daniel, 2011). In the past several years, there has been an inclusion of additional elements, namely Open Access (OA) and Open Educational Resources (OER), within the framework of openness (Dhanarajan, 2012). The prominence of openness in higher education discussions has been amplified, particularly due to the widespread popularity of massive open online courses (MOOCs) (Villamejor-Mendoza, 2013). As a result, openness is gradually being embraced as the prevailing approach. In addition, several concepts such as open access, open learning design, open policy, open educational resources, open educational practices, massive open online courses, open courses, open research, and open data (Butcher & Hoosen, 2014; Weller, 2012) have been included in the framework of openness.

The concept of openness is a response to the evolving technological landscape and serves as the foundation for open universities, which aim to address the requirements of many groups and societies. Bossu (2016) argues that the notion of openness has significant implications within the educational sphere, impacting not only learners and educators but also the strategic goals and policies of university top management. Hence, this essay examines the notion of openness as a concept that influences the techniques employed by institutions and national policy.

In essence, the research objective is to ascertain the extent to which openness in higher education institutions that provide open and distance education is reflected in their vision, mission, core values, and strategies. Additionally, the study aims to determine if this level of representation establishes a novel educational paradigm and necessitates the acquisition of new learning skills.

The primary objective of this research endeavor is to ascertain the manner in which higher education institutions that provide Open and Distance Education depict the concept of openness within their respective vision, mission, core values, and strategies.

## METHOD

This study is a descriptive research endeavor that aims to investigate the current state of openness in mega-universities, namely those that operate in the domain of open and distance education. The focus of this investigation lies within the context of institutional communication management. The study employed document analysis as a qualitative research method. The process of document analysis is characterized by the thorough evaluation of written materials that encompass relevant information pertaining to the occurrence or phenomenon being investigated (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Document analysis refers to the process of collecting and scrutinizing a range of written materials, papers, productions, or remnants that have been authored, prepared, or produced by individuals or institutions in relation to the subject of inquiry (Seyidoğlu, 2016). Within the framework of this study, an analysis was conducted on the vision, mission, core values, and institutional strategies of universities in the online environment, with the objective of assessing the current state of affairs.

### *Population and sample*

The study focuses on institutions commonly known as mega-universities, which are characterized by having a student population of over 100,000. These universities offer a combination of formal education and open and distance learning, encompassing both dual and single modes of instruction (Moore, M. G., & G. Kearsley, 2011:34). Purposive sampling facilitates the selection of samples that possess a wealth of information, thereby facilitating the acquisition of knowledge by addressing key concerns that are integral to the research objectives (Patton, 1990).

The study incorporated a purposive sample strategy that involved selecting colleges based on the presence of mission statements, vision statements, core values, and strategic plans for the year 2018 and beyond, as displayed on their official websites. It is important to acknowledge, however, that the universities under analysis are representative of distinct geographical regions. The study was undertaken within the framework of this particular situation, encompassing a collective of thirteen mega institutions. The items are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Mega universities included in the study

University	Country	Web site
Open University of Hong Kong	China	<a href="https://www.hkmu.edu.hk">https://www.hkmu.edu.hk</a>
Indira Gandhi National Open University	India	<a href="http://www.ignou.ac.in">http://www.ignou.ac.in</a>
Korean National Open University	Korean	<a href="https://knou.knou.ac.kr">https://knou.knou.ac.kr</a>
National Open University-Taiwan	Taiwan	<a href="https://www.nou.edu.tw">https://www.nou.edu.tw</a>
University of the Philippines Open University	Philippines	<a href="https://www.upou.edu.ph">https://www.upou.edu.ph</a>
Open University of Catalonia	Spain	<a href="https://www.uoc.edu">https://www.uoc.edu</a>
The Open University	England	<a href="https://www.open.ac.uk">https://www.open.ac.uk</a>
Athabasca University	Canada	<a href="https://www.athabascau.ca">https://www.athabascau.ca</a>
Anadolu University	Turkey	<a href="https://www.anadolu.edu.tr">https://www.anadolu.edu.tr</a>
Universitas Terbuka (Indonesia Open University)	Indonesia	<a href="https://www.ut.ac.id">https://www.ut.ac.id</a>
National Open University of Nigeria	Nigeria	<a href="https://nou.edu.ng">https://nou.edu.ng</a>
University of South Africa	South Africa	<a href="https://www.unisa.ac.za">https://www.unisa.ac.za</a>
Fern University of Hagen Fern Universität	Germany	<a href="https://www.fernuni-hagen-hims.de">https://www.fernuni-hagen-hims.de</a>

(Wikipedia, 2023)

### *Data collection and analysis process*

The study's data were acquired through an analysis of the vision, mission, core values, and strategic plans found on the websites of 13 chosen mega universities. This analysis was conducted during the period between March and April 2023.

The data obtained in the study was subjected to analysis utilizing the content analysis methodology. Content analysis involves the consolidation and interpretation of comparable facts, wherein they are synthesized within the context of a specific topic or theme and structured in a manner that facilitates comprehension for the reader (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

The content analysis performed in this study was independently coded by three faculty members who possess expertise in the domain of open and distance learning. All coders, operating autonomously, achieved unanimous agreement on the findings. The researchers employed the formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) to

quantify the reliability of the study. This formula calculates reliability as the ratio of consensus to the sum of consensus and disagreement, multiplied by 1000. The researchers selected and analyzed the concepts of vision, mission, and fundamental values as presented on the websites of various colleges. These concepts were then quantitatively assessed using frequency scores. In a similar vein, the researchers examined the statements outlined in the strategic plans of the universities and discerned the elements that embodied the notion of openness. Consequently, the researchers discerned ten distinct themes and the corresponding sentences encapsulating the notion of openness.

## FINDINGS

The present study elucidated the incorporation of vision, mission, and core values into the institutional communication strategies of open and distance education universities, focusing on the frequency of these ideas. Furthermore, an analysis was conducted to ascertain the representation of the notion of openness by examining and elucidating the statements found within the institutional strategies of universities. This analysis was conducted across 10 distinct themes.

### *Findings on the mission, vision, and core values of universities*

The tables below present an analysis of the mission, vision, and core values statements found on the websites of open and distance-learning institutions, along with the frequencies of these statements

**Table 2:** Mission values in universities' institutional strategies

Mission Values	f
Quality open and distance education	12
Digital education	5
Lifelong learning	5
Equal opportunity in education	5
Cooperative work with business world and non-governmental organisations	4
Global education (Internationalisation)	4
Open and flexible learning	3
Focus on vocational qualifications	3
Easy access to learning environments	3
Becoming a world leader	3
Sustainable development goals	2
Access to career-oriented programmes	2
Innovative education and training	2
Learner centred learning	2
Social responsibility awareness	1
Commitment to excellence standards	1
Developing needs-based programmes	1
Increasing academic achievement	1
Resource and infrastructure update	1
Strengthening online support services	1
Providing automation in management	1
Encouraging graduates for corporate collaboration	1

Based on the data presented in table 2, it can be observed that a collective count of 23 distinct mission statements have been incorporated within the strategic plans of thirteen academic institutions that provide Open and Distance Education. Based on the findings presented, it is evident that the term "quality" (f=12) holds significant prominence within the context of Open and Distance Learning (ODL). The subsequent concepts are 'digital education', 'lifelong learning', 'equal chances' (f=5), and 'cooperation with civil society and business' and 'global education' (f=4). The least emphasised statements are 'raising awareness of social responsibility', 'commitment to excellence standards', 'developing needs-oriented programmes', 'increasing academic achievements', 'resources and infrastructure', 'strengthening online support services', 'providing automation in management' and 'encouraging alumni to institutional cooperation' (f=1)

**Table 3:** Visions in universities' institutional strategies

Vision values	f
Being a leader in open and flexible education	4
Open and distance education based on equal opportunity at world standards	3
Open and distance education responsive to community needs	3

University serving humanity	2
Quality higher education	2
Digital transformation in higher education	1
Information network centre	1
Caring for differences and minorities	1
Easy access to learning environments	1
Providing career planning support	1
Open and online university with international recognition	1
Transforming lives and communities	1
Providing lifelong learning service	1
Adapting learning outcomes to national development	1

Based on the findings shown in table 3, an examination of the vision statements included within the strategic plans of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) indicated the presence of 14 distinct statements. Upon analyzing table 3, it is evident that the prevailing vision statement among ODL institutions is the aspiration to become a frontrunner in the field of open and flexible education, as indicated by a frequency of 4. The subsequent themes identified are open and distance education founded on global equal chances', 'open and distance education responsive to community needs' (f=3), university dedicated to helping mankind' and higher education of exceptional quality' (f=2). 'Digital transformation in higher education', 'knowledge network centers', 'giving importance to diversity and minorities', 'easy access to learning environments', 'providing career planning support', 'open and online universities with international recognition', 'transforming lives and societies', 'providing lifelong learning services' and 'adapting learning outcomes to national development' (f=1) emerged as other vision statements.

**Table 4:** Universities' core values in their institutional strategies

Core Values	f
Accountability/Honesty/Ethics	7
Inclusivity	4
Innovative	3
Perfection Excellence	3
Justice and Equality	3
Flexibility	3
Respect	2
Student Centred	2
Openness	2
Accessibility	2
Quality	2
Cooperation	2
Caring for Differences / Being Sensitive	2
Professionalism	1
Sustainability	1
Information	1
Networking	1
Relevance	1
Resolution	1
Commitment	1
Human capacity building	1
Multimodal teaching	1
Affordability	1
Lifelong Learning	1

According to table 4, the core value statements in the strategic plans of 13 higher education institutions (HEIs) highlighted a collective sum of 24 distinct values. The core value statement that received the highest attention from open and distance learning institutions was 'accountability, honesty, and ethics' (f=7), as indicated by the data. Subsequently, the terms 'inclusiveness' (f=4), 'innovation', 'excellence', 'equity' and 'flexibility' (f=3) were observed. The key values of professionalism, 'sustainability', 'knowledge', 'networking', 'relevance', 'resolution', 'commitment', 'human capacity building', 'multimodal teaching', 'affordability' and 'lifelong learning' (f=1) were highlighted less frequently.

### *Findings on Institutional Strategies in Universities*

Upon conducting an analysis of the institutional tactics employed by Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions, it was observed that a total of 10 distinct themes pertaining to the concept of openness were identified. The following concepts are identified: 'pedagogical openness and open admissions', 'stakeholder openness', 'technological openness', 'management/governance openness', 'sustainability openness', 'social contribution openness', 'research and development openness', 'global competition openness', 'ethical issues openness', and 'future projections openness'.

**Table 5:** Statements in the theme of openness in pedagogy

<b>Openness in Pedagogy / Open Admission Policies</b>	<b>f</b>
Innovative learning (Moocs and mobile learning, digital applications)	13
Accessible learning	8
Interdisciplinary approach in education (providing programme diversity)	7
Openness in learner acceptance	5
Recognition of diplomas, certificates and other qualifications (accreditation)	5
Lifelong learning	5
Flexible learning	5
Learner centred approach	5
Building a culture of quality and new data	4
Providing learning support for disadvantaged groups	4
Multilingualism	3
Independent learning	3
Providing equal opportunity	2
Cooperative learning	2
Focus on apprenticeship training	1
Blended learning	1

Based on the findings shown in table 5, it is noteworthy that the theme of openness in pedagogy is prominently reflected in the strategic plans of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Specifically, the strategy statement of 'innovative learning' (f=13) stands out as a prevalent and consistent feature across all surveyed HEIs. The subsequent factors include the promotion of accessible learning (f=8), the guarantee of diverse educational programs (f=7), the acceptance of learners with an open mindset, the recognition of accreditation, the encouragement of lifelong learning, the facilitation of flexible learning and the adoption of a learner-centered strategy (f=5). The least expressed strategy in the pedagogical openness theme were 'focus on apprenticeship training' and 'blended learning' (f=1).

**Table 6:** Statements in the theme of openness in stakeholder

<b>Openness in Stakeholders (Learner-Graduate)</b>	<b>f</b>
Increasing academic success	4
Considering learner needs	3
Interacting with graduate	3
Increasing learner satisfaction	3
Providing career support to graduates	3
Job creation	2
Providing scholarships to learners	2
Managing learner and graduate data	1

Based on the data shown in the table, it can be observed that among the strategic plans of higher education institutions (HEIs), the statement that stood out the most in relation to openness towards stakeholders, specifically learners and graduates, was the objective of 'raising academic achievement' (f=4). Subsequently, the factors of 'responding to learner needs', 'interacting with graduates', 'raising learner satisfaction' and 'offering career support for graduates' (f=3) were observed. In this theme, 'managing learner and alumni data' (f=1) was the least expressed strategy.

**Table 7:** Statements in the theme of openness in technology

<b>Openness in Technology</b>	<b>f</b>
Accessibility to learning environment and resources	4
Adopting innovative technology applications	3
Continuously review technology (and adopt an evolutionary approach)	2

Streamlining data and analytics procurement	1
Training technical staff	1
Creating a digital infrastructure	1

Table 7 reveals that within the context of openness in technology, the phrase that received the highest attention across all universities was 'being available to learning environments and resources' (f=4). Subsequently, there was a pursuit of 'embracing novel technological advancements' (f=3) and 'regularly evaluating technological advancements' (while embracing a progressive methodology) (f=2). 'Streamlining data and analytics procurement', 'training technical personnel' and 'creating a digital infrastructure' (f=1) are other strategies under the theme of openness in technology

**Table 8:** Statements in the theme of openness in management/governance

<b>Openness in Management/Governance</b>	<b>f</b>
Transparency and visibility between the learning and teaching organisation	6
Establishing an information management system (for effective and efficient use of financial and administrative resources)	6
Collaborative governance	6
Ensuring financial sustainability	5
Creating an inclusive institutional culture	4
Digital transformation in governance	4
Improving the quality of governance	4
Clarity in the promotion of academic staff	2
Improve performance appraisal	2
Co-operation between faculties	1
Expansion of staff and teaching staff	1
Providing constructive leadership in the management team	1
Research ecosystem governance	1
Flexibility in governance	1

Table 8 demonstrates the manifestation of the theme of transparency in management and governance within the strategic plans of higher education institutions. The data indicates that the prevailing manifestation of this subject is the concept of "transparency and visibility between the learning and teaching institutions". The statements that garnered attention within this thematic framework included 'establishing a knowledge management system' and 'implementing collaborative governance' (f=6), 'ensuring financial sustainability' (f=5), 'fostering an inclusive culture', 'facilitating digital transformation in governance', and 'enhancing the quality of governance' (f=4). The least frequently mentioned strategies under this theme are 'cooperation between faculties', 'expanding staff and teaching staff', 'providing constructive leadership in the management staff', 'research ecosystem governance' and 'flexibility in governance' (f=1).

**Table 9:** Statements in the theme of openness in sustainability

<b>Openness in Sustainability</b>	<b>f</b>
International co-operative work	4
Ensuring financial sustainability	2
Being a research university	1
Increasing the sustainability of research	1
Providing continuous tutorial training	1
Sustainable quality improvement	1

Based on the findings presented in table 9, it is evident that the theme of openness in sustainability is prominently represented across all higher education institutions (HEIs), with a particular emphasis on the aspect of 'working in international cooperation' (f=4). Another noteworthy concept under this theme was the notion of 'ensuring financial sustainability' (f=2). In this theme, 'being a research university', 'increasing the sustainability of research', 'providing continuous tutorial training', and 'sustainable quality improvement' (f=1) are the least mentioned strategies.

**Table 10:** Statements in the theme of openness in social contribution

Openness on Ethical Issues	f
Public disclosure and accountability in education/training and research activities	1
To instil human values and professional ethics	1

Table 10 illustrates the manifestation of the theme of openness in societal contribution as identified in the strategic plans of the universities. The chart indicates that the emphasis on 'working with industry in vocational and applied subjects' (f=7) is present at all universities. Another statement that highlighted openness in social participation was the provision of in-service support to various industries (f=2). 'Providing physical, financial and technical resources for social contribution' (f=1) is the least mentioned strategy.

**Table 11:** Statements in the theme of openness in research and development (R&D)

Openness in Social Contribution	f
Collaborative work with industry in vocational and applied fields	7
Providing in-service support to different sectors	2
Providing physical, financial and technical resources for social contribution	1

Table 11 reveals that within the context of openness in research and development (R&D), the aspect of 'ensuring excellence in R&D' (f=5) is observed to be significant across all universities. Additional assertions related to this topic include 'providing external research resources', 'facilitating postgraduate education opportunities' (f=3), 'enhancing the caliber of scientific publications' and 'disseminating scientific publishing findings to the wider community' (f=3). The strategies that are least commonly employed within this particular theme include 'enhancing the quality of programs', 'monitoring and updating programs', 'providing research resources within the university', 'enhancing the research skills of academic staff', 'improving the citation index', 'utilizing social networks for research purposes and knowledge sharing', 'promoting the establishment of application centres', and 'acknowledging achievements through open scholarship, data, and academic accomplishments' (f=1).

**Table 12:** Statements in the theme of openness in global competition

Openness in Research & Development (R&D)	f
Ensuring excellence in R&D	5
Providing external research resources (national-international)	3
Providing opportunities after postgraduate education	3
Increasing the quality of scientific publications	3
Sharing the results of scientific publications with the society	3
Ensuring interdisciplinarity	2
Increasing research capacity in niche areas	2
Improving the quality of programmes	1
Update and monitor programmes	1
Providing in-university research resources	1
Improving the research competence of academic staff	1
Citation index optimisation	1
Using social networks for research and sharing	1
Encouraging the establishment of application centres (start up innovations)	1
Recognition through open scholarships, data and academic achievement	1

Table 12 illustrates the thematic concept of openness within the context of global competition. Upon examination of table 12, it becomes evident that the subject of 'Increasing the number of approved programs (f=4) is prevalent across all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The concept of "expanding international exchange" (f=2) was another term used to underscore the importance of openness in the context of global competition. The strategies that were highlighted least frequently were those related to 'enhancing competitiveness and employability', 'fostering an innovative ecosystem, and 'strengthening the university's reputation and vibrancy' (f=1).

**Table 13:** Statements in the theme of openness in ethical issues

Openness in Global Competition	f
Increasing the number of accredited programmes	4
Expanding international exchange	2
Enhancing competitiveness and employability	1
Fostering an innovative ecosystem	1
Strengthening the university's reputation and vibrancy	1

Based on the findings presented in table 13, it is evident that within the context of openness in ethical matters, the statements pertaining to "informing the public and accountability in education, training, and research activities" and "teaching human values and professional ethics" (f=1) garnered significant attention across all universities.

**Table 14:** Statements in the theme of openness in future predictions

<b>Openness in Future Predictions</b>	<b>f</b>
Becoming a preferred university (branding)	4
Creating a campus life that creates a sense of belonging	3
Environmental sustainability	2
Building new and diverse campuses	2
Becoming a leader in digital literacy	2
Clarity in knowledge	2
Digital transformation	1
Increase income	1
Globalization (Internationalisation)	1

According to the data presented in table 14, it can be observed that the concept of 'becoming the university of choice' (branding) (f=4) is a topic of significance for all universities in relation to their openness to the future. Other statements that underscore the theme of openness in future forecasts include 'the cultivation of a campus community that fosters a feeling of belonging' (f=3), 'the prioritization of environmental sustainability', 'the establishment of new and varied campuses', 'the aspiration to be at the forefront of digital literacy' and 'the commitment to transparency in disseminating information' (f=2). 'Digital transformation', 'increasing income' and 'internationalisation' (f=1) are the other strategies in this theme.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to ascertain the manner in which higher education institutions offering open and distance education incorporate the concept of openness into their vision, mission, core values, and institutional initiatives. This study examines how colleges attempt to convey openness through their institutional mission, vision, fundamental values, and methods. The discussion is accompanied by a review of relevant literature.

### 1. Openness of Mission

In the study, an analysis was conducted on the mission statements of 13 colleges, revealing that the statement most commonly employed was "quality open and distance education." Consequently, it was found that 12 out of the total 13 universities placed a significant priority on ensuring high standards in Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Subsequently, the aforementioned concepts of 'digital education', 'lifelong learning', 'equal opportunities in education', and 'collaboration with business and non-governmental organizations' were introduced. Conversely, higher education institutions also emphasized the principles of 'open and flexible learning' and 'learner-centered learning' in their mission statements. A comprehensive examination of the pertinent scholarly works reveals that the notion of quality holds significant importance within the realm of open learning. According to UNESCO (2006), the idea of openness in learning refers to the provision of flexible learning options that liberate students from the limitations of time and place. In a separate study conducted by Angara et al. (2010), the concept of quality in open learning is defined as a learning philosophy that undergoes quality assurance processes. It emphasizes inclusivity by being accessible to individuals, employing diverse methods, and accommodating various locations and ideas. Moreover, it prioritizes flexibility and learner-centeredness, allowing learners to acquire knowledge at their own preferred time, location, and pace, tailored to their unique circumstances and requirements. The prioritization of quality underscores the commitment to addressing the unique requirements of learners by striving to eliminate any superfluous obstacles to the learning process. Hence, the focus on quality in this study aligns with the conceptualization found in existing scholarly literature and also addresses the requirements of learners through the adoption of a learner-centric strategy and the establishment of collaborative learning environments.

Conversely, the concept of lifelong learning has been identified as an additional significant objective of Open and Distance Learning (ODL). According to Jung (2005), the concept of lifelong learning pertains to the ongoing pursuit of information, skills, and values that individuals actively engage in to foster their personal and professional growth throughout the course of their lifetimes. This notion is frequently associated with the domain of adult learning. The inclusion of lifelong and flexible education in the educational missions of the universities examined in this study suggests that the educational offerings cater to individuals of all ages and backgrounds.

In a separate scholarly investigation, Gülen (2019) conducted an analysis of the mission and vision statements of EADTU and AAOU (European and Asian Open and Distance Learning Organizations). The author observed that

the most commonly employed phrases in the findings pertaining to the mission statements of these organizations included 'eliminating constraints in education', 'prominent institution', 'facilitating lifelong learning', and 'fostering global collaboration and partnership'. Based on the available data, it can be asserted that this study exhibits similarities with the conclusions of the previously mentioned study, as both studies incorporate comparable statements within the mission statements of the 13 colleges that were examined. Furthermore, the universities examined place significant importance on quality, as evidenced by the prominence of this focus in their institutional policies. The observed phenomenon can be attributed to the prioritization of delivering high-quality education to learners by open and distance education colleges.

## 2. Openness of Vision

Upon analyzing the manifestations of openness within the visions of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), it was observed that the prevailing articulation often revolved around the aspiration to assume a leadership role in the realm of open and flexible education. As per the findings, it was observed that four out of the total 13 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) placed significant focus on leadership in the context of open and distance education within their respective institutional goals. Subsequently, the aforementioned statements were presented as "Open and distance education founded on principles of equal opportunities at a global level" and "Open and distance education attuned to the specific needs of communities," followed by "A university dedicated to the betterment of humanity" and "The provision of high-quality higher education," in that order. In addition, certain higher education institutions (HEIs) underscored the importance of concepts such as the 'digital transformation of higher education', the establishment of a 'knowledge network center, the recognition and appreciation of differences and minorities, the facilitation of easy access to learning environments, the provision of support for career planning, the aspiration to become an open and online university with international recognition, the goal of transforming lives and societies, the commitment to providing lifelong learning services, and the adaptation of learning outcomes to align with national development objectives. These elements were prominently featured in the vision statements of these HEIs. It is noteworthy that several assertions included within the vision statements of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) also encompass their missions.

Based on the aforementioned data, it is evident that the universities under examination primarily emphasize vision statements that prioritize an open and adaptable approach to distance education. Furthermore, these institutions aspire to further enhance their standing as highly esteemed and influential educational establishments. The focus on leadership bears resemblance to the findings presented in Gülen's (2019) research. While the goal of universities often emphasizes the need for leadership, the most prominent expression in their visions, namely "being a pioneering university," essentially equates to being a leader. Subsequently, the initiative of "providing open access to learning" and the implementation of a "student-friendly system" were undertaken. The survey results align with the conclusions of the aforementioned study. Furthermore, the inclusion of the concept of 'quality' within the purpose, vision, and core values of these universities serves to reinforce their commitment to upholding high standards and ensuring the quality of education in the context of open and distance learning.

The inclusion of quality in the strategic plans of universities that offer Open and Distance Education, as well as its focus in the sub-themes, signifies the significance that universities place on ensuring quality assurance across all stages of development. The institution's commitment to lifelong education and enhanced accessibility through technology is evident in their pursuit of leadership in these domains. This is reflected in their open institutional policies and strategic plans, which are openly posted on their official website.

## 3. Openness in Core Values

Upon analysis of the data pertaining to the core values of the study, it was determined that the prevailing expression among the core values embraced by 13 universities was 'accountability, honesty, and ethics'. As per the findings, it was revealed that seven out of the total 13 institutions expressed the significance of responsibility, honesty, and ethical standards in the context of Open and Distance Learning (ODL). The subsequent principles encompassed inclusivity, innovation, excellence, fairness and equity, flexibility, respect, student-centeredness, openness, accessibility, quality, cooperation, and caring for and sensitivity to diversity. In addition, certain higher education institutions (HEIs) have incorporated the values of professionalism, sustainability, knowledge, networking, relevance, perseverance, dedication, human resource development, multimodal teaching, affordability, and lifelong learning into their basic principles.

The study reveals that ODU commonly incorporate core values and strategic plans that encompass accountability, transparency, pursuit of excellence, accessibility, and lifelong learning to effectively structure their higher education institutions. This suggests that these universities are striving to establish a comprehensive strategic plan with diverse applications for quality assurance and development. When examining institutional communication management from a comprehensive standpoint, it is inevitable that certain concepts, such as quality, lifelong

learning, innovation in education, accessibility, flexibility, openness, and equal opportunities for learners, will be regularly emphasized in the vision, mission, core values, and strategies of the organization.

#### **4. Openness in Institutional Strategies**

Upon analysis of the relevant literature, it becomes evident that the idea of openness is imbued with varying interpretations across many domains and contexts. This highlights the notion that the concept undergoes modifications and evolves in accordance with the surrounding circumstances. The concept of openness can be understood in different ways. Some scholars define openness as the state of being freely accessible without any technical, legal, or price barriers or restrictions on resource usage (Yuan et al., 2008). On the other hand, there are those who argue that openness encompasses a broader range of aspects, including rights, access, use, transparency, and participation (Pomerantz & Peek, 2016). According to the definition provided by Smith and Seward (2017), openness encompasses three key aspects: open production, open distribution, and open consumption. As stated by Bates (2005), the concept of openness pertains to a pedagogical approach that aims to eliminate obstacles to learning and inclusively engage individuals from all demographics, irrespective of age, marital status, or job position. From this perspective, the concept of openness entails the provision of educational opportunities to students who are unable to participate in the conventional in-person education system due to a range of factors (McAndrew, 2010; Littlejohn & Pegler, 2014). This form of openness might be characterized as enhanced accessibility (Maphosa & Bhebhe, 2020). The notion of openness has been extensively examined and defined across various domains, including pedagogy, technical accessibility, ethical use, and the philosophy and policy of education.

In a study conducted by Inamorato dos Santos et al. (2016), it was found that the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission has devised a comprehensive ten-dimensional support framework for open education that holds potential for global application. Based on the provided framework, major dimensions encompass strategy, leadership, technology, and quality, while subsidiary dimensions encompass access, content, pedagogy, recognition, collaboration, and research. The interplay between these dimensions is reciprocal, as they both enhance and constrain one another simultaneously. Therefore, the aforementioned paradigm places significant importance on enhancing teaching and learning environments through the adoption of a comprehensive approach to open education (Ossiannilsson, 2018).

This study examines the institutional tactics employed by universities that offer open and distance education. The findings reveal that statements pertaining to openness may be categorized into ten distinct themes. The identified themes encompass various aspects of openness within the context being discussed. These themes include "Openness in Pedagogy/Open Admission Policies," "Openness in Stakeholders," "Openness in Technology," "Openness in Management/Governance," "Openness in Sustainability," "Openness in Social Contribution," "Openness in R&D-Research," "Openness in Global Competition," "Openness in Ethical Issues," and "Openness in Future Predictions." The concept under consideration has been subject to several attempts at definition, spanning from the domains of pedagogy and technical accessibility to considerations of ethical use and the philosophical and policy dimensions of education.

##### **4.1. Openness in Pedagogy**

The forefront of the theme of openness in pedagogy encompasses various aspects, including innovative learning, accessible learning, an interdisciplinary approach in education to provide program diversity, learner acceptance of openness, accreditation of diplomas, certificates, and other qualifications, lifelong learning, flexible learning, and a learner-centered approach.

The findings indicate that there is a strong correlation between the adoption of pedagogically innovative approaches, such as utilizing MOOCs or mobile learning applications, and the strategies employed by universities offering open and distance education. This correlation is particularly evident in relation to the second key aspect, which is the accessibility of education. The concept of accessibility encompasses various dimensions such as innovation, independence, flexibility, and lifelong learning, particularly in the context of contemporary technologies.

According to Bozkurt (2019), open pedagogy encompasses the information processes, particularly inside online networks and network society, that align with contemporary advancements in technology. Consequently, this notion has gained significance in the present era of digital information.

In his recent scholarly work, Lee (2021) conducts a comprehensive analysis of the historical aspects surrounding the two discourses pertaining to openness and innovation within the realm of online higher education. The emergence and evolution of the discourses surrounding openness and innovation at Athabasca University (AU)

can be traced back to its initial mission statement in 1985. One of the long-term strategies proposed in this statement was the belief that the integration of innovative pedagogy and suitable educational technologies could be achieved. The AU model, which grants learners ongoing access to AU courses and empowers them to design their own learning programs within these courses, was regarded as highly novel and innovative upon its initial adoption. By 2015, the notion of being innovative had come to encompass the utilization of innovative pedagogy and appropriate educational technologies.

In Villamejor-Mendoza's (2013) study, the focus is placed on the incorporation of open learner acceptance into pedagogy, similar to the present study. Villamejor-Mendoza conducted a study on the openness of the Open University of the Philippines (UPOU) with the objective of not only identifying the constituent elements of openness but also elucidating the underlying causes and potential remedies for the issues and challenges that impede the university's ability to fully embody the principles of openness. To establish a comprehensive framework, Villamejor-Mendoza relied on four distinct parameters of openness. The aforementioned concepts encompass open admissions, open curricula, scaled distant education, and the imperative to collaboratively develop, disseminate, and employ open educational resources (OER). However, it is worth noting that the adoption of Open Educational Resources (OER) has been associated with the potential for improved pedagogical methods as well as facilitating learner-centered and personalized learning (Pawlyshyn et al., 2013; Weller, 2014).

Another aspect highlighted in the study is the promotion of openness in pedagogy, specifically in terms of learner acceptance, which encompasses diversity and collaborative learning. In the present investigation, Tietjen and Asino (2021) underscored the significance of fostering learner diversity and cultivating a collaborative learning culture as integral components of open pedagogy.

Upon collective analysis of the statements pertaining to the theme of openness in pedagogy, it becomes evident that they bear resemblance to the findings of previous research conducted within this domain.

#### **4.2. Openness to Stakeholders**

In the domain of stakeholder transparency, the statement that received the highest level of emphasis was 'enhancing academic achievement'. Additionally, other statements that were strongly emphasized include 'attentiveness to the needs of learners', 'engagement with graduates', 'enhancement of learner satisfaction', 'provision of career assistance for graduates', 'generation of employment opportunities', 'provision of scholarships for learners', and 'management of learner and graduate data'.  
graduate

Based on the aforementioned statements, it can be inferred that Open and Distance Education providers prioritize the success and satisfaction of learners and graduates, who are considered internal stakeholders, as a central focus in their strategic plans. To attain this objective, institutions recognize the significance of implementing a framework that incorporates institutional approaches capable of catering to the needs of learners while also offering interactive and career support. The universities' adoption of these strategies might be perceived as evidence of their commitment to cultivating graduates who possess a strong foundation in scientific knowledge and practical experience, enabling them to effectively address the demands of the job market and thrive in competitive professional environments.

Open and distance education universities rely on the involvement of various stakeholders, such as students, professors, faculties, institutions, regions, nations, and the global community, in order to enhance their open pedagogy approach (Kirkwood & Price, 2016; Ossiannilsson et al., 2015). Nevertheless, it is imperative for academic institutions offering distance education to effectively cater to their students by offering diverse strategic program outcomes, all the while making efforts to retain them within the educational system. Furthermore, it is imperative that educational institutions have the capacity to provide job opportunities for their students, enabling them to apply their acquired skills and knowledge in their respective fields of expertise (Barney, 1991). Warren and Churchill (2022) conducted a study that demonstrated the potential impact of universities on their competitors. The authors found that colleges have the ability to strategically plan their success and preference rates by considering the rates at which their graduates are placed in the labor force.

#### **4.3. Openness in Technology**

The expressions pertaining to the theme of openness in technology encompassed various aspects, including the facilitation of accessibility to learning environments and resources, the adoption of innovative technology applications, the ongoing evaluation and assessment of technological advancements, the facilitation of data and analytical provision, the training of technical personnel, and the establishment of digital infrastructure.

Technology has enabled learners to access teaching and learning settings and resources at their convenience, regardless of time and location. The utilization of diverse technologies in progressive pedagogical methodologies has revolutionized the comprehension of teaching and learning, prioritizing the learner and the process of learning within the educational framework. Consequently, this has led to the development of instructional techniques that incorporate novel forms of interaction.

The concept of accessibility is characterized by the absence of impediments, including those of a legal, economical, and geographical nature. From this perspective, it can be argued that open and distance learning play a significant role in enhancing education by overcoming limitations related to time and geography. To comprehend the influence of online learning on accessibility, it is crucial to examine the evolution and advancement of this technological framework (Geith & Vignare, 2007).

According to Khan (2005), the utilization of the Internet and Internet-based technologies can facilitate e-learning within a setting that is open, flexible, and distributed. However, Khan highlights the importance of integrating pedagogy with technology, as technology alone is insufficient to establish a meaningful learning environment. Additionally, it is crucial to comprehend how the distinct capabilities and attributes of various technologies can be effectively employed to facilitate different types of learning for specific content. The current implementation of distance education heavily relies on online platforms. The enthusiasm surrounding online education stems from the potential afforded by the Internet and its associated technologies for the generation, preservation, dissemination, and exchange of information. Computers and the Internet, which are products of information technologies, are often regarded as essential auxiliary instruments in maintaining the continuity of education. The utilization of these technologies not only guarantees the uninterrupted progression of education but also gives rise to novel pedagogical approaches. Furthermore, this approach facilitates the customization of learning experiences, enabling students to progress at their own pace and according to their own abilities (Süral, 2008). From this perspective, it is arguable that open and distance education are reliant on technology-focused comprehension for their advancement and long-term viability.

The concept of flexibility is closely associated with the accessibility of teaching and learning environments and resources. The explanation of flexible learning encompasses four fundamental components, namely pedagogy, practice, organization, and technology (Collis & Moonen, 2002). Conversely, it is imperative that flexible learning hold significance not only for learners but also for all stakeholder groups within the system. For instance, attributes such as convenient accessibility, thoughtfully crafted content, a learner-centric approach, cost-effectiveness, and others suggest that the flexible learning system holds significance for the student. The meaningfulness of flexible learning for course instructors is also derived from the high level of engagement and achievement exhibited by learners in achieving the course aims and objectives. Likewise, the effective utilization of the support services offered brings about satisfaction among the support personnel (Morrison & Khan, 2003). Furthermore, the availability and accessibility of various technologies are crucial for the development and implementation of innovative learning models.

#### **4.5. Openness in Managing/Governing**

The primary focal points within the context of openness in management/governance include the concepts of transparency and visibility between the learning and teaching institutions, the establishment of an information management system that optimizes the utilization of financial and administrative resources, and the implementation of collaborative governance. The aforementioned statements encompass various aspects of academic governance, including the pursuit of financial sustainability, the establishment of an inclusive institutional culture, the implementation of digital transformation in governance processes, the enhancement of governance quality, the promotion of transparency in the academic staff promotion process, the improvement of performance evaluation mechanisms, the facilitation of collaboration between different faculties, the expansion of staff and teaching resources, the cultivation of constructive leadership among management personnel, the effective management of the research ecosystem, and the incorporation of flexibility in governance practices.

Cronin (2017) underscored the importance of implementing evidence-based policies and fostering a collaborative and critical mindset towards openness in order to effectively support faculty, students, and the learning process within the ever-evolving landscape of higher education. To establish an effective university system and management model, it is imperative for the institution to engage in collaborative efforts with all relevant stakeholders, including those with direct and indirect affiliations. Developing open and transparent management approaches that are accountable to stakeholders is considered highly significant (Aktan, 2007).

According to Ellram et al. (2007), the successful implementation of any educational service necessitates the clear definition of work activities and the identification of accountable human resources, as well as the determination of

the specific locations and timeframes for their execution. According to Damodaran (2009), it is crucial for action plans in higher education to incorporate metrics that can assess the effectiveness of human resource utilization as well as ensure prudent budgeting for sufficient human resources. Hence, in order to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of open and distance education applications, it is important to engage in strategic planning, similar to other organizational frameworks.

The implementation of a successful and efficient distance learning strategy necessitates the utilization of systems thinking by organizational managers (Hoyland et al., 2014). This approach enables them to comprehend the intricate interconnections among individuals, tools, pedagogy, and activities. By doing so, it may be ensured that an organization's facilities, technologies, and human resources are adequately prepared to assist instructors and students who may have difficulties utilizing novel tools and modalities. Collaboration is a crucial aspect of strategic planning in the realm of distant education, wherein decision-makers are encouraged to actively engage with and take into account the perspectives and insights of stakeholders possessing extensive expertise and information pertaining to the system in question. In order to ensure effective implementation of a distance education plan, it is imperative to engage in good practice by actively listening to the perspectives and insights of the staff and faculty involved. Although this endeavor may take a substantial amount of time and perhaps necessitate substantial modifications to current processes and services, the process of gathering this information should ultimately lead to the development of distance education programs that effectively utilize the institution's capabilities and resources.

In the context of open and distance education universities, the implementation of transparent and open management/governance practices is imperative. This is crucial for enhancing learner-instructor and institutional satisfaction, ensuring financial sustainability, augmenting student participation, and improving the quality of education (Warren & Churchill, 2022).

#### ***4.6. Openness in Sustainability***

Within the context of sustainability, the concept of openness was prominently highlighted, with particular emphasis placed on "international collaborative work". This was closely followed by the imperative of "ensuring financial sustainability", as well as the aspiration of being recognized as a research university. Additionally, there was a strong focus on enhancing the sustainability of research practices, along with a commitment to providing ongoing training for instructors to ensure their continuous development. Lastly, the pursuit of "sustainable quality improvement" was identified as a key objective within this framework.

The aspiration of open and distance education colleges to achieve sustainability in international collaborative studies aligns with their objective of attaining global leadership in education and garnering recognition. According to Walker (2005), the concept of openness encompasses several key attributes, including convenience, effectiveness, affordability, sustainability, and accessibility, with the aim of benefiting students and educators on a global scale. Within this particular framework, the viability of various forms of open educational resources for the facilitation of teaching and learning is regarded as a crucial element in the establishment, durability, and authoritative position of an institution.

In a study conducted by Farisi (2013), an examination was made into the growth, goals, accessibility, and durability of Open Educational Resources (OER) within the official websites of major Asian universities. The study highlighted that these universities employ sustainability models, namely institutional, formal, user-centric, and revenue-based approaches, which are aligned with the universities' characteristics and policies. These models are implemented to ensure the long-term viability and stability of OER initiatives. The primary concern associated with Open Educational Resources (OER) is sustainability, which refers to the long-term viability and stability of the OER program in light of limited financial resources (Dholakia, et al., 2006; Downes, 2006; Wiley, 2007). Therefore, it is well acknowledged that relying solely on incentives for the sustainability of open educational resources is insufficient (Wiley, 2007). Furthermore, relying solely on open educational resources is insufficient for achieving sustainability in education. To ensure long-term viability, it is imperative to integrate ideas from various interdisciplinary domains, encompassing educational and business perspectives across different disciplines, alongside educational resources. Furthermore, it is imperative that national and worldwide collaborative research endeavors in the realm of open and distance education make significant contributions towards the goal of sustainability.

#### ***4.7. Openness in Social Contribution***

The primary focus in promoting openness in social contribution lies in collaborative engagement with industry partners in vocational and practical domains. This statement was subsequently accompanied by the provision of

in-service support to various sectors and the allocation of physical, financial, and technological resources for the purpose of social contribution.

The indicators that universities offering open and distance education adopt innovative, cooperative, and practical education policies include their commitment to working in collaboration with the industry in vocational and applied fields, offering in-service support to various sectors, and providing physical, financial, and technical resources for social contribution.

According to Yuan and Powell (2013), the concept of openness encompasses the provision of chances for the exchange of ideas, the establishment of connections, and collaboration among both local and international institutions, educators, and students. Additionally, openness facilitates a more profound engagement in the processes of teaching and learning. Consequently, the influence of openness will necessitate the adoption of a novel educational paradigm and the acquisition of new learning skills in the forthcoming era.

#### **4.8. Openness in Research and Development (R&D)**

The predominant focus within the context of research and development (R&D) pertained to the concept of openness, with a particular emphasis on the provision of exceptional quality in R&D endeavors. The aforementioned statement was accompanied by several objectives, including the provision of external research resources at both national and international levels, the facilitation of post-graduate opportunities, the enhancement of scientific publication quality, the dissemination of research findings to the wider society, the promotion of interdisciplinary collaboration, the development of research capacity in specialized areas, the improvement of program quality, the regular updating and monitoring of programs, the provision of research resources within the university, the enhancement of research competence among academic staff, the improvement of citation indices, the utilization of social networks for research purposes and knowledge sharing, the encouragement of the establishment of application centers for innovative startups, and the promotion of open scholarship, data sharing, and recognition based on academic achievements.

The significance of research and innovation in bolstering a nation's economic and social fabric cannot be overstated, with universities occupying a central position in the cultivation of human capital through these endeavors (Ivey et al., 2013). Hence, it is widely recognized that educational institutions that fail to engage in research and neglect to stay abreast of advancements and innovations will fall behind in their ability to effectively respond to competition and the demands of global education. Within this particular setting, the aspiration to establish oneself as a prominent institution of higher learning with a specific emphasis on technology and research remains a highly prioritized concern among open and distance education establishments (Altınpulluk, 2019).

Upon analyzing the mission, vision, and core values outlined in the strategic plans of the open and distance education universities under investigation, it becomes evident that the majority of these institutions aspire to become universities that prioritize and emphasize the establishment of a success-oriented, high-quality educational environment. Additionally, they strive to foster a culture of continuous research utilizing cutting-edge technologies while also focusing on development, innovation, and the broad dissemination of knowledge to a wide range of individuals.

#### **4.9. Openness in Global Competition**

The aforementioned assertions regarding the augmentation of accredited programs, the expansion of international exchange, the enhancement of competitiveness and employability, the establishment of an innovative eco-system, and the aspiration to become a robust, dynamic, and esteemed institution, as frequently underscored within the framework of openness in global competition, can be construed as indicative of the perpetual pursuit of open and distance education universities to possess an international and intercultural orientation. Moreover, these institutions formulate strategic plans centered around competition with the aim of augmenting the diversity of academic knowledge and information accessed and disseminated, leveraging their evolving technologies.

In contemporary circumstances, education has emerged as an integral component of the globalization phenomenon, highlighting the significance of the internationalization aspect of education. The concept of internationalization, particularly in the context of higher education, refers to the deliberate incorporation of an international or intercultural element into the realms of teaching and research (Knight, 2006). From this perspective, the significance of internationalization in the context of open and distance education applications that transcend geographical boundaries and constraints becomes increasingly apparent. This is due to the fact that, in order to keep pace with global advancements, fostering collaboration and establishing partnerships can only be achieved through the process of internationalization. However, it is important to note that the internationalization of higher education encompasses more than just student mobility (Marmolejo, 2011). It also involves the

integration of institutional resources into international partnerships and collaborations, with the aim of generating scientific knowledge and addressing societal challenges.

#### **4.10. Openness on Ethical Issues**

The focal points of openness in ethical matters were the assertions of the dissemination of information to the public as well as the promotion of accountability in educational, training, and research endeavors. Additionally, there was a notable emphasis on the cultivation of human values and professional ethics.

The inclusion of openness in ethical matters serves as a fundamental element that enhances the level of transparency within institutions, bolstering their accountability and, subsequently, their dependability. Openness in ethical matters encompasses various components, encompassing research pertaining to the educational and training endeavors of the institution as well as the dissemination of information to society and the utilization of open educational resources. In the context of open and distance higher education institutions, where open educational resources are commonly employed, it is evident that institutions bear an augmented ethical responsibility. This is due to the fact that the content can be easily replicated and disseminated globally through electronic means, incurring minimal expenses. Given the ease and cost-free availability of open educational resources and educational opportunities (Caswell et al., 2008), it is imperative that we place heightened emphasis on ethical considerations.

#### **4.11. Openness in Future Predictions**

The statement that received the most attention within the context of openness in future projections was "achieving the status of a preferred university through effective branding." Subsequently, the institution aimed to establish a campus environment that fosters a strong feeling of inclusivity and community, prioritize ecological responsibility, construct novel and diversified campuses, assume a prominent role in promoting digital literacy, embrace a culture of knowledge sharing, undergo a digital transition, enhance revenue generation, and actively pursue internationalization efforts.

The prominence of the issue of openness in future projections underscores the inclination of open and distant education universities to prioritize this aspect in their strategic goals. This assertion suggests that the consideration of student expectations and satisfaction should be a crucial component for institutions and instructors when formulating policies. The concept of openness encompasses the strategies and initiatives undertaken by these universities to foster growth, progress, and global reach. This is achieved by focusing on being highly regarded, assuming leadership roles, and embracing internationalization. The metric of success and sustainability for educational institutions is the increase in student enrollment. Therefore, while conferring a competitive edge in the realm of higher education, it can also serve to ameliorate the financial circumstances of the academic department that is experiencing a state of preference. According to Warren and Churchill (2022), the rise in student enrollments has prompted academic departments to pursue a competitive edge by strategically allocating their various resources, such as faculty expertise in pedagogy or research, as well as their utilization of technology. This allocation aims to enhance the delivery of educational products or services in a more efficient manner compared to rival institutions. Additionally, it is asserted that the strategic development of systematic distance education programs, which offer superior effectiveness and efficiency compared to other institutions, might confer a competitive edge in the higher education sector. This benefit, in turn, will contribute to enhancing the financial position of the academic division.

Open and distance education have historically been associated with the provision of educational opportunities to individuals who, due to various circumstances, are unable to participate in conventional in-person educational settings (McAndrew, 2010; Littlejohn & Pegler, 2014). Nevertheless, the incorporation of contemporary digital technology into distance education systems has resulted in enhanced accessibility across all domains (Maphosa, 2020). Hence, it is imperative for universities offering open and distance education to be strategically structured in order to enhance the educational experience for prospective learners. This may be achieved by delivering distinct advantages compared to traditional face-to-face programs, with a particular emphasis on harnessing the potential of digital transformation. The implementation of well-structured and strategic distance education programs, along with judicious selection of technology resources, can confer a competitive edge in the higher education sector and make a substantial contribution to institutional branding.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of open and distance higher education institutions' tactics will be assessed based on the enrollment of students in subsequent years, serving as an indicator of the extent to which the service aligns with their perceived value.

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