E-LEARNING AND FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING:
ARE THEY COMPETITORS?

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The goal of my participation in a “table-talk” session of the Conference is to discuss several issues related to the ongoing work on the master thesis research on the topic “Higher Education and Economic Development: The Importance of Building E-Learning Capabilities”.

For some authors the implementation of the e-learning capabilities into the education system means the utilization of such information and communication technologies as Learning Management Systems [8, p.1178] and popular computer software [2, p.1071] like PowerPoint into their pedagogical practice. In some developing countries, the usage of computers with an Internet access and other types of information-communication equipment [7, p.17] in the educational organizations is considered as the implementation of e-learning technologies.

In the empirical part of my paper I narrow down the broad concept of e-learning capabilities development and examine it on the example of creating and moderating of the massive open online courses (MOOCs/online courses) on Coursera and the National Platform “Open Education”.

One of the key directions of the most vivid discussions among the authors is devoted to the identification of the place of e-learning in general and online courses in particular within the traditional education system.

For example, Sun et al. [9, p.1196] considers the e-learning an alternative for traditional face-to-face education. However, the majority of scientists in this field (including those analyzing this problem in a certain country environment, for instance, in China [10, p.96]) believes that even with the gradual implementation of e-learning into educational programs and the potential of e-learning to “transform tertiary education for the better in the long run” [5, p.7], traditional learning methods still remain dominant [3; 8]. In other words, it makes sense to perceive e-learning as a part of a “blended approach” [7] with combining the traditional classroom studies and e-learning as complementary source for getting an access to additional information, collaboration or revising the topics learned in class [1; 8].

As for the MOOCs, they “have already become a part of the higher education landscape” [4, p.104]. Eleven Russian Universities have online courses on Coursera and/or the National Platform “Open Education”. Here we do not discuss the factors that lead to such a quite massive implementation of the Russian higher education organizations into these platforms (notably, legal basis behind the processes happening and the enquiry for the fast integration of the Russian Universities into the global education system). The national Research University Higher School of Economics is one of the leaders for the amount of the MOOCs on the both platforms; some academic programs have already implemented at least one online course as an obligatory one into the students’ academic plans.

The key questions for the “table-talk” discussion are:

1. Is the learning and teaching process really becoming dependent on the existence of a “media medium” for the generation of the so-called iChildren [6, p.63]?
2. How would you characterize the future of the traditional learning (with lectures, seminars and other face-to-face methods)?

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