

Online studies in China booming

China's online education market is forecast to reach 194 billion yuan (\$29 billion) this year, with the number of active users set to surpass 110 million, according to a report released on Sunday.

More than 90 million people accessed online courses via Chinese platforms last year, and the scale is expected to rise at an annual rate of at least 20 percent, the report suggests.

The survey was conducted by Xuetangx – a website run by Tsinghua University that provides online courses (mostly free) – and iResearch, a consulting firm focusing on internet data. Participants were aged 18 to 30, with 58 percent male and more than 70 percent undergraduates.

The report was based on a survey of 1,440 students who have used Xuetangx services or those of similar platforms during the past year.

It said half the people who access online courses are in large metropolitan areas – mostly Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong province – although it added that the market is expected to expand to smaller cities.

Courses in languages and vocational skills, such as IT training, management and businesses, are in the greatest demand. The most common reasons for choosing online courses are flexibility, diversity of subject matter and access to well-known teachers, according to the report.

Li Chao, CEO of Xuetangx, said despite the rapid development of online education, traditional education will not be replaced completely because both online and offline learning have their advantages.

“Traditional education triumphs in its face-to-face communication, which makes it easy for teachers to track a student's learning outcome, whereas online education triumphs in its flexibility and convenience,” Li said.

He noted a growing acceptance of online education among both users and colleges.

“When online open courses first became available on the internet, no students received credit for attending in their bedrooms. But now some colleges have incorporated online courses into their teaching,” Li said.

“Now we are turning individual credit online courses into a degree program.”