

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Armenian Higher Education System: Challenges and Perspectives

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Abstract : Humanity has been still coping with the new COVID-19 pandemic. Healthcare providers, economists, psychologists, and other specialists speak about the impact of the virus on different spheres of our life. In the list of similar discussions, the impact of pandemics on global education is of utmost importance. Ideally, providing quality education services should be crucial, and the ways education programs are being adapted will determine the success or failure of the service providers. The paper aims to summarize the research touching upon the current situation of higher education in Armenia. The research includes data from official reports, surveys among education leads, faculty, and students, as well as personal observations and consideration. Through descriptive analysis, the findings of the research are being presented from various aspects. Interim results of the research unveiled two major issues in the sector of higher education in Armenia. On the one hand, the entire compulsory digitization of instruction, assessment, and grading has evoked serious gaps related to the lack of technical competencies. There is an urgent need for professional development programs that will address most of the concerns due to the shift to the online instruction mode. On the other hand, online teaching and learning require revision and adaptation of the existing curricula. Given that the content of certain programs may not be compromised, the teaching methods, the assignments, and evaluation require profound transformation, which will still be in line with course learning outcomes and student learning outcomes. The given paper focuses on the ways the mentioned issues are being addressed in Armenia. The extent of commitment for changes and adaptability to the new situation varies from the government-funded and private universities. In particular, the paper compares and contrasts activities and measures taken at the Armenian State Pedagogical University and the American University of Armenia. Thus, the Pedagogical University focused on the use of Google Classroom as the only means for teaching and learning as well as adopted the compulsory synchronous instruction mode. The American University, on the contrary, kept practicing the academic freedom, enabling both synchronous and asynchronous instruction modes, ensuring alignment of the course learning outcomes and student learning outcomes. The State University utilized the assignments and assessment, which would work for the on-campus instruction mode, while the American university employed a variety of assignments applicable for online teaching mode. The latter has suggested the utilization of multiple apps, internet sources, and online library access for a better online instant. Discussions with faculty through online forums and/or professional development workshops also facilitate restructuring and adaptation of the courses. Finally, the paper will synthesize the results of the undertaken research and will outline the e-learning perspectives and opportunities boosted by the known devastating healthcare issue.

Keywords : assessment, compulsory digitization of education services, online teaching, instruction mode, program restructuring

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