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DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Digital higher education is growing so fast since the spread of Covid-19 in 2020, most universities were not prepared for transforming all their teaching activities into e-learning. This paper discusses the development of digital education at universities and the challenges it faces. In conclusion, digital higher education will not go back, and universities have to adapt to this new reality and start preparing the grounds for the success of digital education. Both students and tutors benefit from e-learning, students can receive a diploma at lower cost with greater ability to work during their studies, professors will be able to find job opportunities while staying at their home countries. Digital education faces many challenges including the lack of research related to this new technology and some technical difficulties that need to get solved.

Keywords: digital education, online examination, globalization, online teaching platforms, online materials, digital technologies

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ЦИФРОВАЯ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ В ВЫСШЕМ ОБРАЗОВАНИИ

Цифровое высшее образование растет так быстро с распространением Covid-19 в 2020 г., что большинство университетов не готово к преобразованию своей образовательной деятельности в цифровой вид. В этой статье рассматриваются развитие цифрового образования в университетах и проблемы, с которыми оно сталкивается. Следует сказать, что цифровое высшее образование не исчезнет, и университеты будут вынуждены адаптироваться к этой новой реальности и начать готовить основу для успеха цифрового образования. И студенты, и преподаватели получают выгоду от цифрового образования. Студенты могут получить дипломы по более низкой стоимости с большей возможностью работать во время учебы, а преподаватели смогут находить работу, оставаясь в своих родных странах. Цифровое образование сталкивается с многими проблемами, в том числе с недостатком исследований, связанных с использованием этой новой технологии и с техническими трудностями, которые обязательно нужно решать.

Ключевые слова: цифровое образование, онлайн-оценивание, глобализация, онлайн-образовательные платформы, онлайн-материалы, цифровые технологии

The Rise of Digital Higher Education. The initial growth of e-learning technology at universities was mainly attributed to globalization, universities worldwide break down geographical and social boundaries to offer distance learning education, this leads to integrations of academic standards and views, and as a result, the population of online students has increased at a relatively high rate. The traditional higher education concept has changed radically over the last decade and especially since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, on-campus teaching is facing big challenges and isn't anymore the only and best available learning option especially with the rapid development of digital technologies and high-speed internet. Nowadays, a new higher education era is built and mainly based on the revolution of online education, students are easily able to enroll in high quality online education whenever they want and wherever they are, as long as they have online access and a suitable digital device.

Digital education is important because it improves learning quality and extends the reach of every lecturer and tutor. E-learning motivates learners with different abilities to attain their desirable

educational level by providing new and creative teaching methods [1, p. 87]. Digital technologies will dominate the economic activities for the coming decades; however, digital transformation requires to use the available digital technologies in an effective way. The growth of digital education at most universities is not expected to slowdown in the future as most universities are working hard to develop the infrastructure needed for this digital trend. The e-learning is primarily driven by students' willingness and is influenced by their behaviors, universities are thinking about significant and possibly overdue improvements to their digital offering, it is vital that practitioners be encouraged to develop the skills and confidence they need to move seamlessly between the online and offline world. For this purpose, universities should conduct specific in-depth studies about their business models and digital experiences to satisfy students' needs.

The flexibility of online education enables both teachers and students to set their own learning pace and to select a schedule that fit everyone's agenda, online education increases productivity and time management. As a result, studying through online educational platforms help students to better balance between work and studies without giving anything up, which help students to gain work experience while they are studying. Nowadays, most universities and higher education schools are offering their students an online version of their programs and for most of their majors, or offering programs that combine both online with on-campus teaching. Online programs offer great opportunity for college students to get their diploma, or degree without physically setting foot on a university campus.

Digital education enables students to enroll in any university in the world if they meet the entry requirements without the need to travel abroad and bear the living expenses in another country. It also opens up the door for qualified people to teach at universities across the world without physical presence or following a rigid schedule, this will help universities to find highly qualified professors with lower salaries to teach online courses. With online programs there's no reason for people to give up on working or studying at their mother countries while exploring new and exotic places. Online education considers the specific requirements and abilities of each individual student, the size of online classes tends to be smaller than conventional ones. In addition, most online learning platforms allow greater interaction and faster feedback between students and their tutors, students could have an access to a very diverse online materials such as videos, photos, and eBooks, tutors can also integrate other formats like forums or discussions to improve their lessons and improve the interaction with their students [3, p. 166–168].

Online programs at universities help students to pay less tuitions then on campus education. Online education help students from low-income households to afford university fees and offer them wide range of payment options; let students pay in installments or per class. Students also can save money and benefit from online materials and e-books which are often available for free.

Challenges facing Digital Education at Universities. Digital education will create numerous challenges for all universities across the world especially for top ranked and ancient universities. Some universities, that built their reputation over the years focusing on small details, will lose big part of their comparative advantage as online education standardizes teaching tools and curriculum across universities. Top ranked universities that charge very high tuition could face high pressure to lower their fees as a result of increasing competition and global economic problems, this will create financial problems for most prestigious and other top universities worldwide. The classification of international universities will be greatly affected by the transformation into digital education and there will be new standards used to classify universities. Digital education will help many universities in the world to attract more students as Covid-19 has impacted negatively most economics across the world, most countries have entered into deep recessions and the consequences of this pandemic will last for many years to come. The flexibility of online education, the low-cost fees, and the economic problems in most countries will push many students around the world to move toward digital education in the future.

Examination and grading criteria are the main challenges associated with online education, universities must start to change their rigid policies about grading philosophy, the objective of any

university program should focus primarily on providing the knowledge and skills required by the learner. Digital examinations should be viewed from three perspectives; students find online examinations more effective as results and feedbacks are quicker, and the more they get familiar with the online examination platforms, the more they feel comfort psychologically. Teachers' incentives for changing from traditional to digital examinations are very concrete and the main obstacle could be the time it took to learn a new system and to prepare online exams. The major obstacle to the transformation of digital examinations can be found at the central administration level [2, p. 104–106].

Conclusion. Digital education without any doubt has changed the traditional concept of higher education, this change will not only cover the teaching tools, however, it will include the curriculum itself and the standards used for evaluation. This paper introduces the general aspects of digital education; however, this topic requires in-depth studies about each aspect related to this educational transformation. Some of these studies could be performed immediately to assess the deficiencies in digital education and to take quick actions if mistakes were committed, while other studies can be conducted several years after the implementation of the online learning to precisely analyze this new teaching model at universities.

This paper sheds light on the rapid transition into digital education at most universities across the world due to the spread of Covid-19 in 2020. Most of these universities weren't prepared to implement this strategic transformation in education at a large scale. The rapid growth of digital education will continue and universities should adjust their business models accordingly and should develop their strategies for maintaining high levels of student motivation and engagement as a core feature of the technology-enhanced learning experience.

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