

The Main Problems of Distance Learning Management and its Impact on the Economy in RA

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Key words: *distance learning, higher education, financing of higher education, rent, education reform*

PREFACE

2020 was a significant year both for Armenia and for the whole world. It has been marked in history by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic and emergency measures deriving from it, undertaken from March 2020, changed the mechanisms of the organization of higher education. Universities switched to distance learning within just a few days, with insufficient technological means and clearly set mechanisms for regulating the educational process in terms of its content. The pandemic was a grave challenge for higher education in Armenia, a challenge which served as an opportunity to appreciate the role and importance of distance learning in our lives. Within the framework of this article multiple studies were carried out to identify and evaluate the impact of the pandemic on the normal course of education. Reference was made to the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic periods to examine the changes in the behavior of applicants, students and universities. The article can give the reader an opportunity to make a choice between traditional and distance forms of learning. It also allows to form a general idea about the ways and methods of organizing distance learning. The studies present several recommendations aimed at promoting the transition to distance learning.

The purpose of the research is to study and analyze the peculiarities and main problems of distance learning management and its impact on the RA economy.

To achieve this purpose, we address the following problems in the article:

- examine the impact the pandemic has had on the quality of education, and in particular on access to it,
- present the peculiarities and main problems of distance learning,
- present the positive and/or negative influence of distance learning on the economy of RA,
- develop recommendations that address problems of quality and accessibility of distance learning.

Introduction: Everyone, regardless of their age, sex, nationality, religion and geographical location, has the right to education. We shall not be deprived of the very important opportunity to study due to social insecurity, physical disability and

the impossibility of attending educational institutions. Distance learning is one of the best ways to ensure continuous education. Distance learning is a collaboration between a teacher and a student at a distance. This education method is not new: it has emerged in Great Britain in 1980 and was called “The Open University”. In the 21st century, computers and the Internet have abruptly entered our lives, making distance learning easier and more accessible. For distance learning to be effective, it is necessary to properly organize the capabilities of the computer. Team work, cooperative learning, active learning processes are important during the implementation of educational technologies within distance learning. This technology requires the implementation of research and acquisition of knowledge through joint or individual actions that enable one to occupy different social roles in the enterprise and finally develop independent critical thinking. [3]

- Asynchrony: during the process of learning the teacher and learner work at a time convenient for them.
- Profitability: the economic effectiveness of distance learning.
- Lecturer: the new role and functions of lecturer.
- Learner: the requirements from learners significantly differ from those of traditional methods.
- New Information Technologies: all information technologies are used in modern distance learning: computer, computer network, system multimedia, etc.
- Socialization: in some ways, distance learning relieves social tensions by providing equal access to education regardless of location and financial requirements.
- Internationality: distance learning provides good facilities for the input and output of the Curriculum.

The aforementioned peculiarities determine the advantages of distance learning over other forms of learning, and in the meantime, they make certain demands on both the teacher and the student, not alleviating and in many cases even complicating learning.

Apart from peculiarities, distance learning also has a range of advantages, including:

- Independent choice of place and time of study,
- introduction of the latest technologies in education,
- the possibility of being away from the university or enabling disabled people to get a classical education,
- 70% reduction in operating costs,
- individual work with the lecturer and independent work with video materials as well as e-books,

- opportunity to participate in teleconferences,
- communication with databases and banks through computer networks,
- presence of work flexibility factor,
- exclusion of geographical boundaries and absence of territorial barriers.

Is there an establishment in RA that offers distance learning to its students? Until 2020, the provision of distance learning was considered a modified form of education, yet the pandemic turned it into a necessity in 2020, which in its turn is considered a means and mechanism for restraining the risk of disrupting the normal course of learning in such cases.

The first educational institutions in RA that provide distance education are the NAS RA International Scientific and Educational Center and the RA Academy of Public Administration, which are participants of the joint distance master's program "Business Administration". It is, in its turn, the only educational program in the entire region of RA, which is implemented remotely.

"Business Administration" joint distance master's program was launched in 2015 within the context of the grant program "Distance master's education with awarding of a joint diploma".

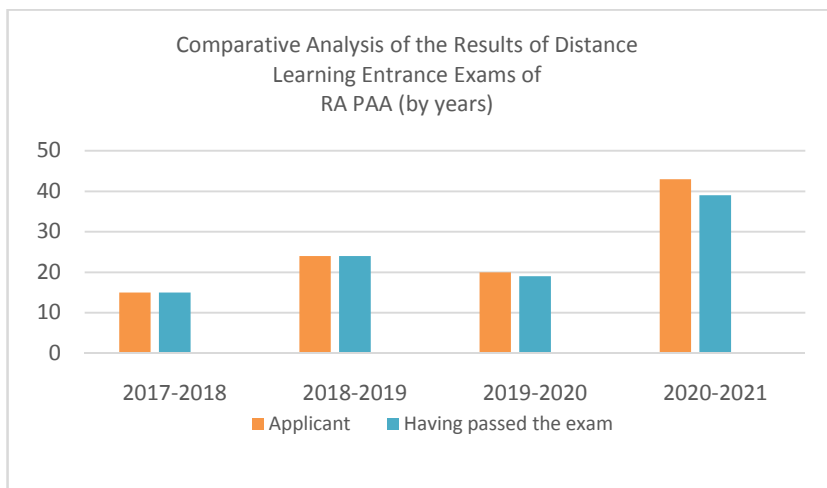
This educational program is for those who want to start or develop their own business, but do not have time to attend classes.

Master's degree educational program "Business Administration" is carried out by the chair of Administration of the RA PAA. Admission is carried out in two competitive stages: submission of documents and interview (written, oral). Applicants with at least a bachelor's degree are eligible for admission. The form of education is distance learning, and the annual education fee is 650,000 (six hundred and fifty thousand) AMD.

In order to ensure the high quality of distance learning system, the RA PAA carries out an analysis and evaluation of the goals and problems related to the educational programs. It is guided by following its educational strategic plan and evaluating the results of its program of activities. [8]

Comparative analysis of 2017-2021 master's degree entrance exam results for part-time and distance learning [9].

Table 1



Some higher education institutions in RA have also shifted to distance learning for a certain period of time during the coronavirus pandemic.

As of April 1, 2020, around 42.5% of the world's current population was in quarantine. According to UNESCO data, on April 1, 2020 schools and universities were closed in 185 countries, affecting 1,542,412,000 learners, which forms 89.4% of the total amount of learners.

According to clause 21 of the annexe to the decision N 298 of the Government of the Republic of Armenia dated March 16, 2020, during the entire period of state of emergency (starting from March 16, 2020), caused by the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the educational system, including all universities, switched to distance learning.

The list of RA state and interstate universities is presented below;

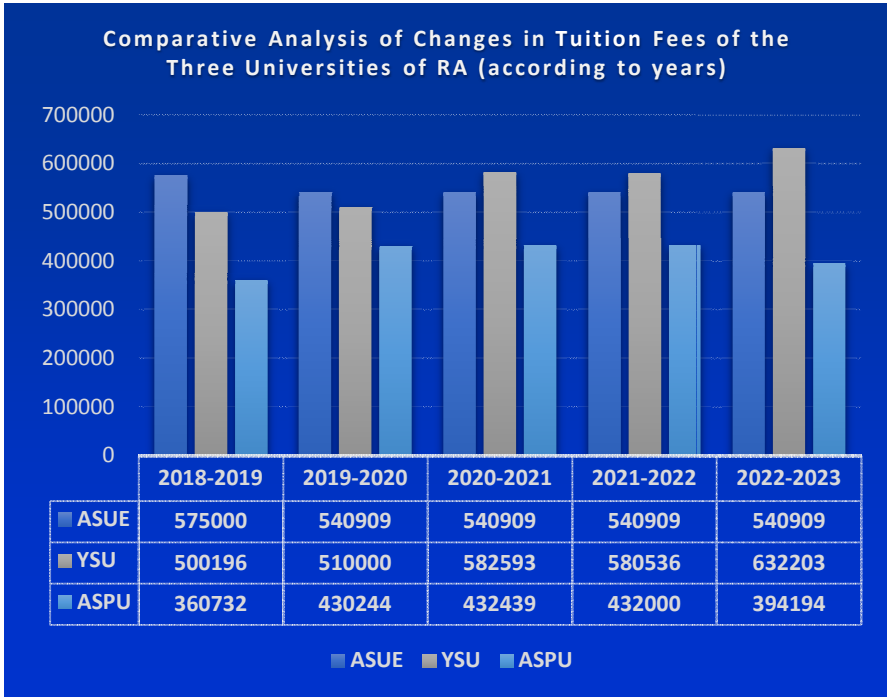
Under the coronavirus pandemic conditions, the fees of universities of the Republic of Armenia have also increased.

Web classes – distance classes, conferences, seminars, business games, laboratory work, seminars and other forms of learning conducted through telecommunications and other features of the World Network. Web classes use specialized educational web forums, a form of user work on a specific topic or problem, using posts left on one of the websites that have the corresponding

¹ Compiled by the author.

program installed. Web forums differ from chat classes in providing a possibility of longer work and asynchronous nature of interaction between students and teachers. To perform analysis, three RA universities were studied: ASUE, YSU and YSPU. [5], [6], [7]

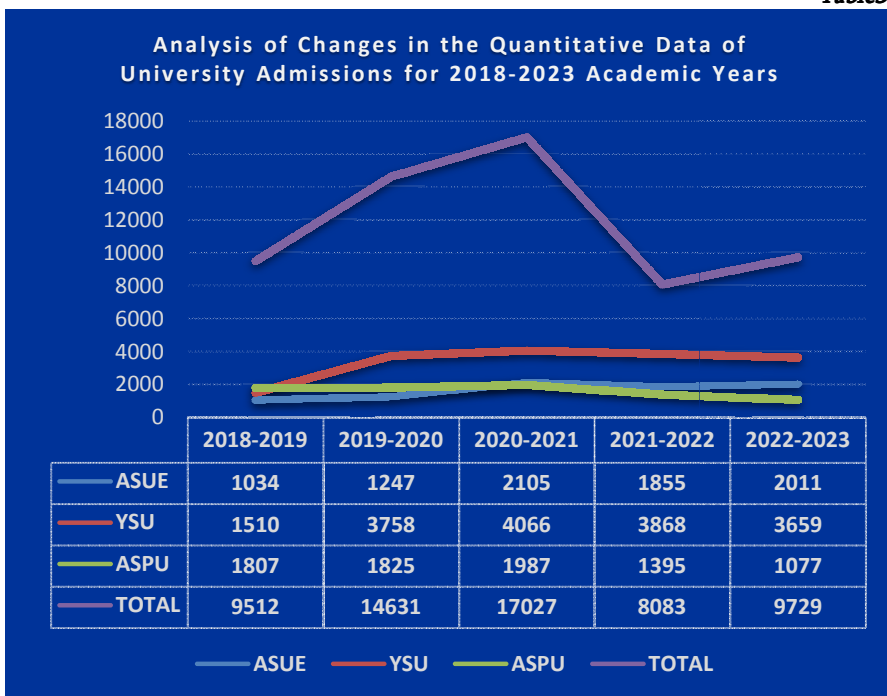
Table²



As can be seen from the chart, ASUE has remained stable according to the results of the comparison of changes in tuition fees, that is, from the 2019-2020 academic year until now, the fees have not changed along with the number of faculties. Fees at YSU have increased year by year, which may also be due to the increase in the number of faculties. And in the case of ASPU, the contour of changes in university fees over the years has taken the form of a hill, which may be due to a change in the quantitative number of faculties.

In addition to tuition fees, we have studied the increase in the number of students by performing an analysis for the period of 2018-2023.

² Compiled by the author.



The maximum amount of the students number enrolled on RA universities was recorded in 2020, which may be due to many factors. Let us discuss some of the possible factors:

1. Facilitation of student admission - unlike the rest of the academic years, students were admitted with one exam that year.
2. A 13.89% reduction of expenses in connection with the above-mentioned factor, which is a huge number, taking into account that about 1/3 of the population of Armenia is poor.
3. Reducing housing costs – the majority of RA students are from regions and do not have an apartment in Yerevan, therefore, due to the shift to distance learning during the pandemic, they mainly saved the costs of apartment rent and transport.

Basically, these factors are related to accessibility, which is partially solved by distance learning.

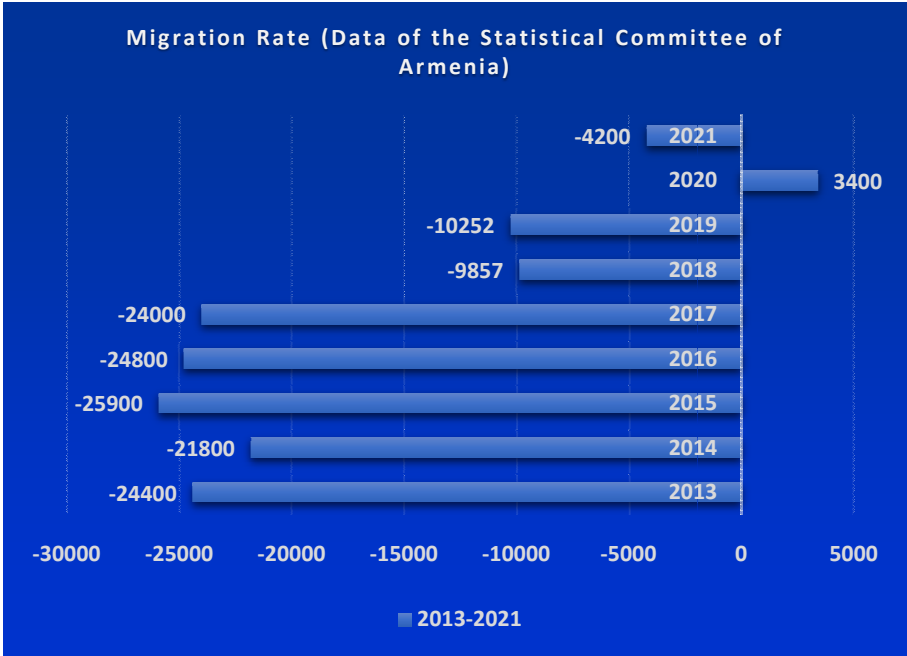
Comparing the above-mentioned indicators of analysis with the corresponding

³ Compiled by the author.

indicators of PAA RA, it becomes clear that PAA RA is in the most favorable role in terms of providing education with its distance master’s program.

The number of applicants to universities depends on a number of factors, and it should be noted that emigration in our country also affects the activities of universities. Let’s analyze the emigration indicators in the table below.

Table 4

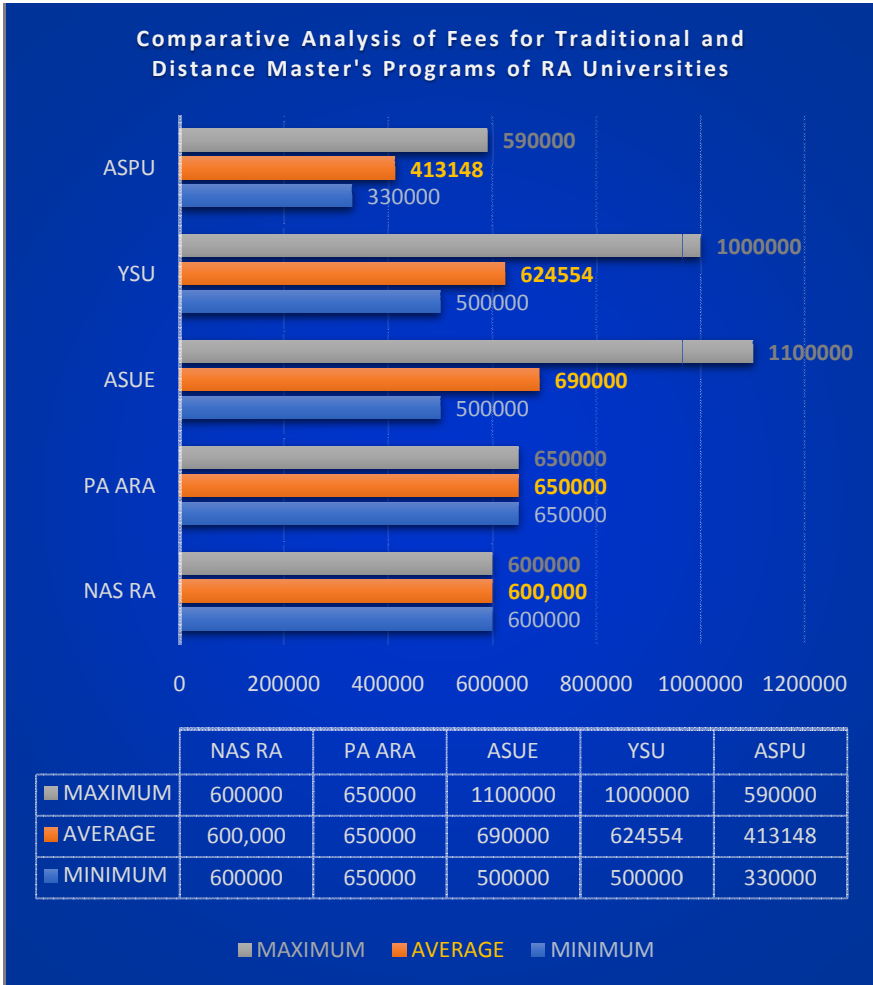


According to the migration rate data for 2013-2021, on average 15,757 people emigrated from Armenia per year. People aged 15-29 make up more than 25% of immigrants. It turns out that annually, on average, 0.73% of people belonging to this age group emigrate from the RA, which is a great danger for the RA due to the “brain drain”, because the majority of potential students, current students and most people with higher education are in this age group. From this perspective, distance learning can moderate the pace of migration to some extent, as people in the 15-29 age group mostly go abroad to study and hunt for a job. In the 2020-2021 academic year, the total number of undergraduate and graduate students was about 80,000. Approximately 50,000 people studying at state universities paid fees. And this is

⁴Compiled by the author.

despite the fact that in recent years there has been an increase in poverty in Armenia (about 1/3 of the population is poor). This proves the fact that education is highly valued in the RA, which forces us to think and bring to life such programs that will help to increase the quality and standards of the current education [4].

Table 5



A bigger role is given to distance education abroad. For instance, the Faculty of Continuing Education at the University of Oxford invites students from all over the

⁵ Compiled by the author.

world to part-time, evening and distance learning programs with duration from one to two years, several months, weeks or just one day, as well as distance learning programs.

The Faculty of Continuing Education at the University of Oxford offers over 60 distance learning programs and courses. The duration of courses is on average from 5 to 10 weeks. Upon completion, a diploma, certificate or other document is issued, depending on the program. The cost of short-term courses for citizens of the UK and the EU starts from 100 pounds (approximately 48,827 drams), and for citizens of other countries, including students from the countries of the former USSR, from 130 pounds (approximately 63,475 drams).

The MA program in International Human Rights Law at the University of Oxford offers a unique opportunity to obtain a degree from the University of Oxford via distance learning. This program allows you to earn a master's degree from the University of Oxford without leaving your own house. The duration of the program is 2 years, and the cost is about 19,000 pounds (about 9,277,098 drams), which is about 2.5 times higher than the cost of in-person education. Oxford Annual tuition fees in 2022 range from £26,770 to £37,510. Added to this is the cost of a student visa, health insurance and nine months of living, starting at £10,575. Let's also take into account the fact that at the end of studies, students are given two diplomas, which is equivalent to simultaneously graduating from two different universities, and this, in its turn, is a flexible and practical cost reduction mechanism. Switching to distance learning in the Republic of Armenia has its complexities. Regardless of this, we offer several transition stages:

1. Each university should develop and implement a distance learning platform in the form of programs that will provide the opportunity to “reject”, for example, the Zoom remote communication platform and its software defects that hinder the normal completion of course.
2. The transition to distance learning should be gradual, which will reduce the risk of stressful situations for participants in distance learning.
3. As a part of distance learning, much attention should also be paid to updating the mechanisms and programs for learning an international language and including practical experiments in working with new methods.
4. A program, displaying the students' frequency of class attendance that helps the lecturer when conducting exams and includes the questions from one's absent classes.
5. A rigid and at the same time flexible control system should be provided. For example, holding regular lectures and so on.
6. An online library system, the use of which will be encouraged, should be created and developed.

7. The scoring system should be revised. For example, a mechanism should be created in which the student himself chooses the assessment goal, which, in its turn, cannot be lower than the minimum assessment goal set by the university.
8. Specific norms that will make the student think more maturely about the problem of understanding and using this freedom correctly should be defined.
9. Provided that the learning will be remote, the problem of time management will be solved to a bigger extent, so it is possible to organize internships at the same time. It will solve the problem of university graduates not prepared for professional life.
10. The high level of such education should be provided, to make sure that the development of current students and graduates is not one-sided, namely in the form of emigration from RA.

Thus, we can state that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is great on the education system in almost all countries of the world. Thousands of universities, including those in Armenia, have faced various problems in organizing the educational process in a qualitatively new environment. Research shows that even universities that are in the lead of financial, technical and other terms have not managed to avoid problems. The effects of the pandemic are not limited to short-term impacts. Even after the restoration of the normal course of education, the effects of the pandemic will be manifested in the medium and long-term prospects, affecting educational strategies and practices.

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**Հեռավար ուսուցման կառավարման և տնտեսության վրա դրա
ազդեցության հիմնախնդիրները ՀՀ-ում**

Լիանա Օսիպյան

Ամփոփում

Հանգուցային բառեր. *հեռավար ուսուցում, բարձրագույն կրթություն, բարձրագույն կրթության ֆինանսավորում, վարձավճար, կրթական բարեփոխում*

2020 թվականը ամբողջ պատմության մեջ նշանավորվել է COVID-19 համաճարակով, որը և առիթ է հանդիսացել արժևորելու հեռավար կրթության դերն ու նշանակությունը: 2020 թ. ապրիլի 1-ի դրությամբ աշխարհի ներկայիս բնակչության շուրջ 42.5 %-ը գտնվում էր կարանտինում: Համաձայն ՅՈՒՆԵՍԿՕ-ի տվյալների՝ 2020 թվականի ապրիլի 1-ին փակվել էին դպրոցներ ու բուհեր 185 երկրում՝ ազդեցություն ունենալով 1.542.412.000 սովորողների վրա, որոնք կազմում են ընդհանուր գրանցվածների 89.4 %-ը: ՀՀ-ում բարձրագույն ուսումնական հաստատությունները որոշ ժամանակով ևս անցում են կատարել հեռավար կրթությանը: Հեռավար ուսուցման անցման ժամանակաշրջանում Հայաստանի Հանրապետության բուհերի վարձավճարները գնալով աճել են, և միաժամանակ աճել է բուհ ընդունվող ուսանողների թվաքանակը՝ առավելագույն արդյունքը գրանցելով 2020 թվականին, ինչը կարող է պայմանավորված լինել բազմաթիվ գործոններով:

1. Ուսանողների ընդունելության հեշտացում. ի տարբերություն մնացած ուստարիների՝ այդ տարում ուսանողները ընդունվել են մեկ քննությամբ:

2. Վերոնշյալ գործոնի հետ կապված ծախսերի կրճատում 13,89 %-ով, ինչը ահռելի թիվ է այն պարագայում, որ Հայաստանի բնակչության շուրջ 1/3 մասը աղքատ է:

3. Բնակության ծախսերի կրճատում. ՀՀ ուսանողների մեծամասնությունը մարզերից է և չունի բնակարան Երևանում, ուստի համաճարակի ընթացքում հեռավար կրթության անցման շնորհիվ նրանք կրճատել են հիմնականում բնակարանի վարձակալության և տրանսպորտի հետ կապված ծախսերը:

Այսինքն՝ հիմնականում այս գործոնները կապված են մասշտիվության հետ, որը մասամբ լուծում է հեռավար կրթությունը: Արտերկրում շատ ավելի մեծ տեղ է հատկացվում հեռավար կրթությանը: Հազարավոր համալսարաններ, այդ թվում՝ հայաստանյան, բախվել են որակապես նոր պայմաններում կրթական գործընթացը կազմակերպելու տարբեր խնդիրների: Ուսումնափորությունները ցույց են տալիս, որ խնդիրներից գերծ չեն մնացել նույնիսկ ֆինանսական, տեխնիկական ու այլ տեսանկյուններից առաջատար դիրքեր ունեցող համալսարանները: Համավարակի ազդեցությունները չեն սահմանափակվում միայն կարճաժամկետ ազդեցությամբ: Կրթության բնականոն ընթացքի վերականգնումից հետո էլ համավարակի ազդեցությունները դրսևորվելու են միջնաժամկետ և երկարաժամկետ հեռանկարում՝ ազդելով կրթական ստրատեգիաների և պրակտիկաների վրա:

Проблемы управления дистанционным обучением и его влияние на экономику в РА

Лиана Осипян

Резюме

Ключевые слова: дистанционное обучение, высшее образование, финансирование высшего образования, плата, реформа образования

2020 год отмечен в истории пандемией COVID-19, что послужило поводом оценить роль и значение дистанционного образования. По состоянию на 1 апреля 2020 года около 42,5% нынешнего населения мира находились на карантине. По данным ЮНЕСКО, 1 апреля 2020 года школы и вузы были закрыты в 185 странах, что затронуло 1 542 412 000 учащихся – 89,4% от общего числа зарегистрированных учащихся. В период перехода на дистанционное обучение плата за обучение в вузах Республики Армения постепенно росла, и в то же время увеличилось количество студентов, поступающих в вузы: максимальный результат был зафиксирован в 2020 году, что может быть обусловлено многими факторами:

1. Облегчение приема студентов в отличие от остальных учебных лет. В этом году студенты поступали в вуз, сдавая только один экзамен.

2. Сокращение расходов, связанных с вышеуказанным фактором, на 13,89%, что является огромной цифрой в том случае, что около 1/3 населения Армении бедны.

3. Сокращение расходов на проживание: большинство армянских студентов из регионов и не имеют жилья в Ереване, поэтому во время пандемии, благодаря переходу на дистанционное обучение, они сократили в основном расходы на аренду жилья и транспорт.

То есть, в основном, эти факторы связаны с доступностью, которая частично решает дистанционное образование.

За рубежом гораздо больше места отводится дистанционному образованию. Тысячи университетов, в том числе и армянских, столкнулись с различными проблемами организации образовательного процесса в качественно новых условиях. Исследования показывают, что не обошлось без проблем даже для университетов, занимающих лидирующие позиции в финансовом, техническом и других аспектах. Последствия пандемии не ограничиваются краткосрочными последствиями. После восстановления нормального хода образования последствия пандемии будут проявляться в среднесрочной и долгосрочной перспективе, влияя на образовательные стратегии и практики.

Ներկայացվել է 14.04.2023 թ.

Գրախոսվել է 15.05.2023 թ.

Ընդունվել է տպագրության 25.05.2023 թ.