

Chapter 7

COVID–19 Infodemic and Social Responsibility of Ukrainian Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The chapter intends to investigate the influence caused by COVID-infodemic upon the functions carried out by Ukrainian HEIs. As the pandemic and lockdown quickly and unpredictably changed the form of educational activities, HEIs were faced with new challenges and had to demonstrate the updated approaches of their performance not only in educational activities but also as for their social functions. Based on the survey results, the chapter highlights the student’s opinion on changes in the performance of the respective universities caused by COVID, infodemic and post-COVID society as well as student understanding of university mission “to contribute to the public good” under the new circumstances. Survey-based research showed that according to the student opinion, modern Ukrainian are to play a more important role in meeting the societal needs of the society, especially under the influence of unpredictable and controversial factors like COVID-infodemic.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of January 2020, based on the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of March 11, 2020, № 211 “On prevention of the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19 on the territory of Ukraine” (The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine № 211 “On prevention of the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19 on the territory of Ukraine”, March 11, 2020), the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine issued several recommendations on strengthening sanitary and epidemiological and preventive measures, including in terms of foreign students and international mobility. Those measures included:

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7164-4.ch007

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- to refuse to hold and participate in mass events on the premises and the territory of educational institutions, particularly trial external independent evaluation, Olympiads, competitions, contests, exhibitions, etc.;
- not to send students and employees of institutions to countries with a high risk of infection;
- to inform students and staff on how to prevent the spread of the disease and action in case of illness;
- to develop measures for conducting classes with the help of remote technologies and for practising classes following the curricula after the normalization of the epidemic situation;
- develop measures for partial transfer of employees to remote work;
- provide preventive measures to prevent the widespread of acute respiratory disease caused by a coronavirus and acute respiratory infections;
- to allocate in the dormitories of vocational schools, professional higher, higher, postgraduate education places for isolation of students with signs of acute respiratory diseases;
- implement the decisions of temporary regional anti-epidemic commissions;
- to limit the holding of planned meetings, inspections, examinations to the normalization of the epidemic situation (Letter of the Ministry of Education and Science /1 / 9-154, March 11, 2020.).

The main task of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine in March 2020 was to prevent the spread of coronavirus infection in Ukraine and to contribute to the development of digital learning and the electronic educational environment.

During 2 months, February-March 2020, the HEIs of Ukraine were implementing or/and developing the system of digital learning. By the end of March, 80% of higher education institutions had started the off-line regime of activities. At the same time, some sectoral subsystems (for example, universities that train professional personnel for the spheres of culture or agriculture) were moving to the new format of the educational process more slowly than others, which was partly due to the peculiarities of the organization of the educational process in them as well as connected with the specificity of the profession (medical universities, etc.).

From the very beginning, the Ministry of Education and Science abandoned the detailed regulation of the work of universities during a pandemic, emphasizing the importance of proactive action by the collectives of universities, depending on specific conditions. The Ministry of Education and Science relied on the independence and competence of university management teams, ensuring the development of a regulatory framework and intensive communication both vertically and horizontally: they concerned not only the organization of distance education but also the work of hostels, the employment of students, the organization of volunteer activities of students, psychological support for students and teachers.

Thus, under the conditions of COVID-2019 the activities carried out by the universities in the sphere of education and science had dramatically changed. The standard view of HEIs as institutions for the creation and dispersion of knowledge and preparation for future careers was supplemented by a wide range of social functions. Apart from educational function, the modern HEIs are to perform their indirect functions – they are social actors whose activities, among other things, are aimed at ensuring the development of society. To achieve this aim, higher education institutions contribute to the dissemination of academic knowledge and practical development of universities, forming a ‘knowledge society’ and satisfying the needs of the society (Tryma, 2019). Being traditionally a very important part of the public sector, under the conditions of infodemia caused by COVID-2019, the HEIS faced with several

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