Chapter 9
Impact of the COVID–19 Pandemic on the Digital Transition in Higher Education in Uzbekistan

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ABSTRACT

Digital technologies are transforming all aspects of human activity. Uzbekistan also does not stand aside from these transformations—digitalization affects all sectors of the country's economy. The digital transition in education, particularly in higher education, has accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic. This chapter focuses on studying the digital transformation of higher education in Uzbekistan and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on this process. Different aspects of applying online teaching and learning in higher education in that emergency period in Uzbekistan and the perspectives of their development are analyzed here. The chapter's findings highlighted the pandemic's impact on digital higher education and the responses to adapting to the learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has significantly impacted higher education, transforming how institutions deliver education to students. The widespread use of digital technologies has made online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and digital assessments more accessible to students and faculty, offering a flexible and convenient way to learn (Sharma, 2020). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in education, with institutions forced to shift to remote learning to ensure the safety of students and faculty (Khusanov et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2020).

Despite its benefits, implementing digital transformation has been challenging for many institutions. The digital divide remains a significant issue, with not all students having equal access to digital resources and technology (Johnson et al., 2015). Institutions also face cybersecurity concerns, as the increased use of digital technologies means more opportunities for cyber threats and data breaches (Balanskat & Engelhardt, 2015). Furthermore, adopting digital technologies requires significant faculty and staff training investment, which can be a significant financial and logistical burden (Jukes et al., 2010).

Uzbekistan is one of the countries that has embraced the digital transformation trend and has been actively implementing it in all areas of its economy, including education. The Uzbekistan government recognizes the importance of digital transformation in education and has been working to create a more digitally integrated learning environment. In 2020, the "Digital Development Strategy of Uzbekistan until 2030" was adopted, outlining the strategic goals and directions for digital transformation in education and other sectors (DP, 2020a).

The education sector has been a crucial focus of the digital transformation strategy. The improvement in the material and technical base of higher educational institutions in Uzbekistan has facilitated the introduction of digital technologies, including creating electronic resource centers and adopting cloud technologies (DP, 2019; DP, 2020b). These technological advancements have allowed the use of modern teaching methods based on high-performance information technologies, such as distance and evening forms of education, mobile and online learning technologies, and the recognition of distance education as one of the primary forms of education.

Given the significance of the digital transformation strategy in Uzbekistan's education sector, studying the problems and experiences of developing digital teaching methods and digitalizing other aspects of the higher education system in Uzbekistan is essential.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter focuses on the digital transformation of higher education in Uzbekistan and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on this process. Different aspects of applying distance teaching and learning in higher education, the challenges faced in implementing digital teaching methods, the best practices for ensuring successful digitalization, and their development prospects are analyzed here.

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