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EDITORIAL

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

TRANSFORMACIÓN DIGITAL DE LAS INSTITUCIONES DE EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR, COMO CONSECUENCIA DE LA PANDEMIA POR COVID-19

TRANSFORMAÇÃO DIGITAL DAS INSTITUIÇÕES DE ENSINO SUPERIOR, COMO CONSEQUÊNCIA DA PANDEMIA COVID-19

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The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of daily life and higher education has been no exception. Temporary closures of higher education institutions (IES in Chile) due to the COVID-19 pandemic have affected approximately 23.4 million higher education students and 1.4 million faculty members in Latin America and the Caribbean, representing more than 98% of the region's higher education student and faculty population[1].

The interruption of face-to-face activities prompted IES to move rapidly from classroom to online learning systems, which has involved orienting their administrative and academic processes towards virtualization[2]. This has created a revolution in higher education systems and has promoted hybrid models online and offline teaching, which are developed through the use of e-mail, videoconferencing, virtual libraries and other types of digital platforms[3].

It is relevant to point out that the pandemic requires, among some other aspects, to reflect on the need to: 1. Strengthen teacher training in dimensions such as e-learning pedagogy and in the acquisition of basic skills and abilities in multimedia learning theory and instructional design. 2. Incorporate new pedagogical strategies, considering the profiles of new students, with diverse experiences and skills. 3. Reinforce an adequate academic data infrastructure and understand the use of intelligent analysis tools as complementary to the teaching and learning process. 4. Reconsider the role of evaluation within the educational process, in the context of virtuality[4].

Additionally, it should be noted that digital transformation implies a series of profound and coordinated cultural changes; and in the university this transformation should be comprehensive, affecting all its functions, but from a strategic perspective that involves a redefinition of its institutional model. In other words, it is not a matter of introducing technology or digitalizing processes to continue doing the same and just adding a technological layer. True digital transformation requires process reengineering and involves the most critical element of the institution, namely its members. Therefore, it poses a technological challenge, which has to be combined with the challenge of integrating people so that these technologies are adopted in the most transparent way and can, subsequently, achieve adequate process innovation. To reach this difficult goal, the leadership capacity of university government teams is essential; only in this way it may be possible to define a top-down strategy that creates the technological and procedural framework of reference for the university community. This framework must, in turn, offer a margin of operational freedom for the university community to carry out its activities with innovation and creativity, and this strategy should even be flexible enough to benefit from these upward flows and thus contribute to knowledge management in a digital context[5].

Despite these transformations, it is necessary to keep in mind that face-to-face activities are irreplaceable in many training processes, as well as in the professions that focus on the contact with people. Although one of the opportunities the lockdown has made possible is the development of virtual strategies to continue with the training processes; there is no doubt that this requires a revalorization of the face-to-face social contact and the development of relational skills, especially in the health area, where it is essential to provide humanized care. For this reason, virtual activities should only be complementary to the face-to-face activities.

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