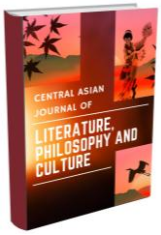

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*Article*

# The Role and Importance of Higher Education Institutions in the Digitalization Process

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the transformation of the higher education system in the context of globalization and digitalization, demonstrating that the introduction of modern information technologies into the educational process leads to changes in both the content and form of education. It also examines changes in the higher education admission system, the level of student participation in research activities, and related challenges, based on statistical data. In addition, the experience of leading universities, the importance of research activity, and issues related to the massification of higher education are analyzed. The need to modernize the education system, enhance its flexibility, and harmonize scientific and moral values is also substantiated.

**Keywords:** Transformation, Pragmatization, Modern Labor Market, Ivy League, MOOC.

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## 1. Introduction

The processes of economic globalization, the increasingly rapid development of technology and information technologies, and the digitalization of all spheres of human activity inevitably affect the education system as well, giving rise to new changes and trends in the organization and content of teaching, as well as to non-standard pathways of its development [1].

As a result of the transformation of access to higher education, pre-school education is also undergoing changes. We are already witnessing a trend in which instruction provided by private tutors and various preparatory courses is becoming more important than education in general secondary schools. However, thorough preparation for entrance examinations also requires the financial stability of applicants' families [2].

Statistics from the Higher School of Economics (Russian Federation), examining students' involvement in extracurricular activities, including research, provide highly informative data [3]. The results showed that, among all surveyed students, 17% participated in scientific conferences and research clubs, 12% took part in academic competitions, 6% published the results of their scientific and project-based research, and 3% were involved in research activities as full-time or part-time members of scientific laboratories, while the remaining 62% had never participated in any form of research activity [4].

## 2. Materials and Methods

In this study, a comprehensive approach was employed to analyze the transformation of the higher education system under conditions of globalization and digitalization. The research methodology included system analysis, comparative analysis, and the interpretation of statistical data. In particular, the experiences of developed and developing countries were examined comparatively, including the development of massive open online course (MOOC) platforms and their impact on the quality of education. Furthermore, an empirical analysis was conducted based on statistical indicators reflecting students' participation in research activities [5]. During the research process, theoretical sources, scientific articles, and open-access data related to the activities of international organizations and universities were utilized. The methodological approach aimed to identify institutional changes in higher education and its interconnection with economic and social factors. Based on this, contemporary development trends and challenges in the education system were scientifically analyzed [6].

## 3. Results and Discussion

The transition to digital education has accelerated the growth of the large market for open online courses. In addition, the governments of the United States and European countries encourage universities and schools to implement and promote MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). For example, in June 2021, the University Grants Commission (UGC) in the United States requested that all universities allow students to transfer credits earned from courses registered on the Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) platform into their academic records [7]. The UGC also urged universities to collaborate in introducing and promoting massive open online courses through the SWAYAM platform so that students can benefit from them as much as possible [8].

The leading platform in providing massive open online courses is the American platform Coursera. Through this platform, more than 25 million users have the opportunity to access higher education. Its annual revenue amounts to 150 million US dollars, which demonstrates its leading position among online education service providers. The success of this platform lies in its extensive cooperation with over 150 higher education institutions across 29 countries worldwide [9]. Thanks to this collaboration, students can access distance learning in 180 academic programs, including four master's degree programs [10].

Among such higher education institutions, Ivy League universities in the United States traditionally hold a leading position. They have achieved success by combining long-standing traditions of academic and research activity with the effective commercialization of modern educational products. In particular, Harvard University is among the leaders in the development of MOOCs, while Columbia University is a leader in research on 3D printing technologies for biological materials and in the field of nanomedicine, among other areas [11].

In a post-industrial society, the increasing complexity of economic processes and the growing demand for goods and services lead to the mass expansion of higher education in order to meet the needs of labor markets. However, it must also be acknowledged that such expansion increasingly results in the simplification of educational programs designed for the "average" learner and a decline in the quality of professional training. Its aim is not to form a scientific worldview, but rather, in many cases, to train specialists in narrow, specific fields [12].

Despite differences in the level of development of higher education between developing and developed countries, it must be acknowledged that leading research

activity is an integral component of prestigious universities. Possessing strong academic traditions and unique methodologies developed by leading scholars is a key factor not only in institutional development but also in the advancement of national education systems [13]. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT, USA) has consistently ranked among the top universities in the world for many years. At the same time, it has achieved notable success in training outstanding individuals across nearly all fields of science and technology. Among its faculty and alumni are more than 80 Nobel Prize laureates, as well as Kofi Annan (UN Secretary-General, 1997–2006; Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 2001), Virgilio Barco (President of Colombia), and Mario Draghi (President of the European Central Bank, 2011–2019), along with astronauts, founders of major companies, leading scientists in the technology sector (including those associated with Intel), and researchers in genetics and artificial intelligence [14].

Despite the complexity of internal transformations, the education sector remains responsible for meeting the needs of society. Although globalization contributes to addressing certain social issues, local, regional, or national development is, in any case, directly linked to the success of universities located in a given area. Such universities are expected to foster a cognitive, scientific-technical, entrepreneurial, and industrial ecosystem around themselves, thereby contributing to the overall economic development of the region. This is reflected in the formation of quotas for specialties required by the local labor market and service sector, the design of educational programs aligned with the sociocultural context of the region, support for graduate adaptation, interaction with local authorities, provision of expert services and technological solutions when necessary, attraction of investment to the region, and contributions to improving public welfare and the standard of living.

The pragmatization of higher education requires a reconsideration of universities' axiological strategies. Higher education institutions are not only sources of education and venues for training qualified specialists, but also sources of specific scientific and moral values. These values must not only be formed in the minds of graduates but also be transmitted to society through various channels. The harmonization of the individual, their development through values, the enhancement of creative and productive activity, and the teaching of methods for integrating personal, social, regional, and national values should be a continuous process accompanying educational activity.

As noted, in the context of digitalization and the pragmatization of knowledge, it is essential to develop universal models of higher education, as well as roadmaps for its diverse development and adaptation in response to the evolving dynamics of education and the labor market. However, all researchers acknowledge that processes of transformation are inevitable. Therefore, they propose various scenarios for these ongoing changes.

Thus, the relevance of the issue is demonstrated by the need to reconsider the concept of education and to identify directions for its successful transformation. At the same time, the multidirectional nature of globalization processes, their unpredictability, and their inherent contradictions call for a more active understanding of this issue and a more rapid search for solutions. This is because an increasingly outdated model of state education, the conservatism of the academic environment, and efforts to slow the development of private universities may not only hinder the advancement of higher education but also impede the formation of civil society and slow the pace of a country's economic development.

Moreover, the individuality of transformation processes, the absence of ready-made templates for reproducing successful models of higher education, and the limited philosophical understanding of ongoing processes do not allow for the direct implementation of specific concepts, but instead necessitate the search for an optimal compromise [15].

## 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the processes of globalization and digitalization have a significant impact on both the content and form of the higher education system. Although the expansion of massive open online courses has increased access to education, it has also made the issue of maintaining consistent educational quality increasingly important. At the same time, the low level of student participation in research activities indicates that existing opportunities are not being fully utilized. The experience of leading universities confirms that research activity and innovative approaches are key factors in determining the quality of education. However, the massification of higher education may, in some cases, lead to its simplification. Therefore, it is important to ensure a balance between quality and accessibility in the education system. Overall, in the current context, the development of higher education requires the formulation of flexible strategies, consideration of national needs, and the integration of scientific and moral values.

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