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EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING IN KAZAKHSTAN DURING COVID-19

ЭКСТРЕННОЕ УДАЛЕННОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ ВО ВРЕМЯ COVID-19

Abstract:

Student-centered learning has been an integral part of higher education during the COVID 19 pandemic even though the faculty's role in student-centered learning at higher educational institutions has not been sufficiently considered in the broad context in Kazakhstan's higher education institutions. This study aims to explore the experience of faculty in order to revisit the teaching philosophy of courses in the programs of the Department of Kazakh Language and Turkic Studies at the Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan. The study seeks to answer questions about the working conditions of faculty and how they used technological tools when the deal with problems, with particular focus on the impacts of COVID 19 on faculty and their teaching philosophy. Instructors were given online surveys, including a questionnaire about their home setting, technical issues that they are dealing with, and their physical and mental health. Student's feedback for fall 2020 semester has been integrated to study as well as syllabi analysis of the faculty.

Keywords: digital citizenship, emergency remote teaching, COVID-19 pandemic, Kazakhstan

Аннотация:

Обучение, ориентированное на студентов, было неотъемлемой частью высшего образования во время пандемии COVID 19, хотя роль преподавателей в обучении, ориентированном на студентов, не рассматривалась в достаточной степени в высших учебных заведениях Казахстана в широком контексте. Это исследование направлено на изучение опыта преподавателей с целью пересмотра философии преподавания курсов в программах кафедры казахского языка и тюркологии Назарбаев Университета в Казахстане. Исследование призвано ответить на вопросы об условиях работы преподавателей и о том, как они использовали технологические инструменты при решении проблем, с особым акцентом на влияние COVID 19 на преподавателей и их философию преподавания. Инструкторам были предложены онлайн-опросы, в том числе анкеты об их домашних условиях, технических проблемах, с которыми они сталкиваются, а также об их физическом и психическом здоровье. Отзывы студентов за осенний семестр 2020 года были интегрированы в учебу, а также в анализ учебных планов факультета.

Ключевые слова: цифровое гражданство, экстренное удаленное обучение, пандемия COVID-19, Казахстан

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered us into a digital age while fundamentally changing our lives. An ongoing paradigm of education has shifted in higher education during COVID-19, proving to be an inescapable transition to a student-centered approach in which learning outcomes play the central role and become the main objective of the educational process. The role of faculty has shifted away from being an instructor as the center of attention to become a mentor, encouraging students to take more responsibility for their learning, providing resources, and motivating them to learn. When the pandemic occurred in 2020, most of the faculty were not ready to move into the online teaching/learning environment. However, there was no other option for them.

Background

Nazarbayev University (NU) initiated strict measures after the first case was detected in Kazakhstan on March 13, 2020. The University administration immediately took action to protect the NU community following an announcement by made the government officials. The policy "work-from-home" began on March 16 when the number of the cases rose to 111, with more than half in Nur-Sultan city in which the university is located. When in-person classes had stopped on March 19, faculty had been asked not to come to the campus. Students were notified to leave the Nazarbayev University's campus by March 20. An online platform, Zoom, was introduced to the entire faculty by the university administration as an easily accessible technology. Almost all students were sent to their homes before the city underwent a quarantine on March 20. Subsequently the government announced a strict lockdown on March 28 and restricted all movements in the city.

Work from home

Faculty and students were given extra time to adjust themselves to the new norm. All faculty and staff were reassigned to work from home. On March 26 the president of the university sent a guide on how to work from home to all faculty and staff, in the e-mail, letter #7, extending spring break for students until April 5. Working from home became the norm on April 6. All faculty members were notified to check on their classes and identify any technology and other issues. Faculty worked with the Vice Deans for Academic Affairs to move their courses and assessments online, suggesting open book exams. Some typical assessments were recommended, such as case studies, group-based interviews, essays, and research papers instead of summative assessments. Faculty was asked to revisit their syllabi for online teaching and

include relevant assessments by the school administrators. This article describes how the faculty of the Department of Kazakh Language and Turkic Studies (KazLT) adjusted themselves for online education. We will discuss how they addressed the concepts of digital citizenship and student centered learning while we discuss online working conditions, technical problems and their own well-being. Unfortunately, we could not find any scientific local publication in Kazakh about teaching online during COVID-19 pandemic except for two websites[1].

Digital Citizenship

The Department of KazLT included "digital literacy" among other goals of the department to prepare students for technological literacy and digital technologies in April 2020. They defined digital literacy as how to use Internet technologies and apply them to respective subject matters, to empower students to also use the Internet in their daily lives. One of the goals is to prepare students to manage how to be digital citizens. The department aimed to usher the students into the digital world as genuine digital citizens (Mossberger, 2008). This is more than acting online or using technology, but a broader sense, an "heuristic concept" that contributes to social relations and practices (Couldry, 2014). Citizens of the digital world not only engage internet technologies as instruments; they also reconstitute themselves and create a cultural environment as the result of interactions that they engage in. They bring their old experiences and their expectations to the online platforms (Choi Moon-son, 2016). Users are expected to separate their official usage and their social interactions and behave appropriately. We will not discuss social media usage, but we will consider online platforms faculty used during online education that the university administration made mandatory. Thereupon, both faculty and students had found themselves as appointed digital citizens since they did not have a choice to teach or learn in a conventional face-to-face in-person platform. The entire university had moved to online platforms because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similar to conventional citizenship, digital citizenship is constituted around rights and responsibilities in the digital world (Ribble, 2017, p.7). Ribble claims that there is an assumption of tension between teachers and students who see each other as more competent on technologies. Ribble also argues that students are considered the natives of the digital world, whereas teachers are immigrants who enter this world later. He emphasizes the necessity of teaching digital citizenship in his book, in which he defines nine elements that are the basis of technology use and forms the foundation on which digital society is based. Ribble's nine elements of digital citizenship are of particular interest to teachers. These include digital access, digital commerce, digital communication, digital literacy, digital etiquette, digital law, digital rights and responsibilities, digital health and wellness, as well as security (Ribble, 2017, p. 16). The concept of digital citizenship underlines the positive aspect of technology so that everyone can work and play in the digital world.

"Students today have not known a world without these digital technologies. As a result, many teachers assume that their students, as digital natives, already know everything there is to know

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[1] The Foundation of the First President and the Corporate Foundation "Academy of the President" held the third online conference on "Digitalization of universities: a step-by-step algorithm" within the development discussion platform "Birge Oqý". In April 25, 2020. Retrieved from: https://fnn.kz/kz/news/376?return= %2Fkz%2Fsite%2Fnews% 2Fview%3Fid%3D207%26return_target%3Dnormal&return_target=normalThe Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan shared some information from various universities, about using of online and distance learning technologies during the COVID-19 pandemic. This site presents all the measures taken in Kazakhstani universities during online learning, for example: https://enic-kazakhstan.kz/ru/post/52

about technology. Additionally, some teachers do not feel as competent as their students around these technologies and are often afraid to make mistakes and learn from their students. But the truth is not all students are as technology savvy as teachers might assume, and not all teachers are as incompetent as they fear even when students are comfortable using technology effectively. Both students and teachers need to find common ground. They all need to become members of a digital citizenry" (Ribble, 2017).

Since the global COVID-19 pandemic has forced schools and universities to quickly move education online, it has significantly altered entire lives of educators and learners (Wang, 2020). Faculty of the Department of KazLT at NU had to deepen their digital knowledge and implement it in their courses. One of the positive aspects of COVID-19 is that teachers and students suddenly have become digital citizens who are also a part of global digital society. However, many faced different challenges such as inaccessibility to the resources and poor digital skills. Serious questions arose about the roles of teachers, required online tools, and assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is still a question how respond to their students' needs while both parties are also under the psychological impact of the pandemic. This article seeks to find common ground between faculty and students of the Department of KazLT illustrating how ready the faculty was for digital citizenry.

Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)

Millman (2020) described the approach as "pandemic pedagogy" when all faculty and students were forced to work or study under the stay-at-home order. What all faculty and students experienced due to COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 was emergency remote teaching, albeit not only online teaching. The Department of KazLT adopted a temporary policy for teaching two sections of each course in order to support faculty and give them enough time to prepare their courses in online settings.

Transferring from emergency teaching to online teaching changed the definition of online teaching. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, online teaching was a marginal teaching method which based on none or restricted face-to-face mode. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic and mandatory online period a synchronous mode was added that was widely used until university administration notified faculty that students could not access to the Internet at a certain time. The NU administration made it clear that students prefer blended learning and using both synchronous and an asynchronous mode, after an evaluation at the end of Fall 2020. However, some of the faculty conducted only asynchronous classes.

Faculty and administration focused on convenient delivery of the courses. Instructors either provided online lectures or recorded lectures for the students or voiced over PPTs. Some professors recorded their synchronous lectures and share the Zoom links with their students. University administration provided enormous help to the instructors. Innovation Learning Hub (ILH) organized weekly online tutorials on tools such as EdPuzzle, NearPod, Padlet as well as creating QR codes. Staff made themselves available for the faculty who needed technical assistance. Faculty of the Department of KazLT faculty organized workshops to share their individual experiences with the other faculty. The transition period is not over yet. The faculty have been working on online lectures, workshops, and expanding their network on the social media and the Internet.

Methodology

We used both qualitative and quantitative research methods in terms to survey and analyze syllabi. We distributed an online survey to the participants' emails. This survey targeted only the faculty of Department of KazLT since the ultimate goal of the research was to come up with a framework to teach Kazakh and Turkic languages online. The other area of the research was to

get data from students, administrators and parents. We gave a questionnaire to the faculty at the end of Fall 2020 when NU finished completed full online teaching. A questionnaire with 70 questions was prepared in English, Kazakh, and Russian and delivered to 23 faculty members by Qualtrics. 21 faculty members Faculty members of the Department of KazLT who ranged from 4 to 24 years of teaching experiences responded to the survey. All results were collected anonymously. We analyzed data based on the concept "digital citizenship" to see how prepared and comfortable the faculty were. We used content analysis of syllabi as the qualitative method. We also used class feedback reports for all classes at the School of Sciences and Humanities at NU in Fall 2020 collected by the school administration.

As a part of content analysis approach, syllabi of the randomly chosen courses were collected to understand how faculty adjusted their syllabi from traditional teaching to online teaching. We compared syllabi of the chosen courses before and during COVID-19. Since the number of the responders was low and the survey was conducted in a small department, we erased the name of the courses or instructors in order to keep their names confidential and we have marked them in capital letters such as Course A, Course B, so on. The content analysis of course syllabi seek to achieve the following intended outcomes.

- Have the instructors changed in their syllabi?
- What kind of tools and apps have the instructors used in online teaching?
- What has been changed in delivering the classes before and during the COVID-education in the teaching philosophy?

Findings

Demographic profile of the respondents:
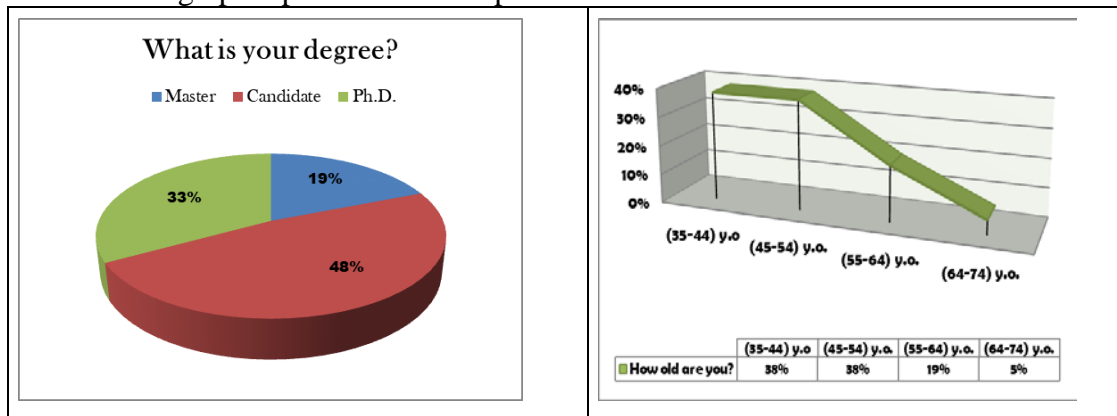
Contributions may explore, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- Online teaching tools

- Challenges in the assessment process

- Tools/methods of online assessment

How did faculty experience ERL during COVID-19 pandemic? The results revealed that faculty's experience with using technology was enough to fulfill a smooth transition to ERL. During the stay-at-home teaching period faculty over all took good care of their well-being. However, we found that a few faculty members did not have all technological tools to teach online. When the Fall 2020 began, we expected them to be ready to online teach instead of continuing ERT. However, our findings shows that most of the faculty maintained ERT.

What changed in your life after Covid- 19?
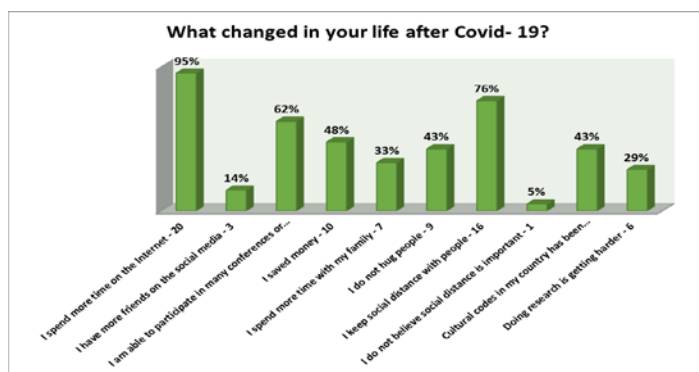
Digital access and working conditions:

Three faculty used their offices when faculty were allowed to access based on the COVID-19 situation in Nursultan. 12 faculty preferred to work from home although 9 of them preferred to work at their offices. This number overlaps with the faculty who live with their children: six of them do not have a private office or separate room at home.

Two faculty members did not have their own laptops. Three of them prepared their lectures and other activities on the phone. Faculty used laptops, desktops, or tablets. Only one of them did not have all equipment such as webcam, microphone, or headset. NU administration allowed faculty to take their office desktops to their home. Most of them fifteen had good, two had excellent Internet and three had average Internet connection. None had a poor Internet connection. This might be explained because some faculty members live in university housing. All faculty members were able to deliver their lectures without any problem during ERT.


How ready do you feel to teach online?
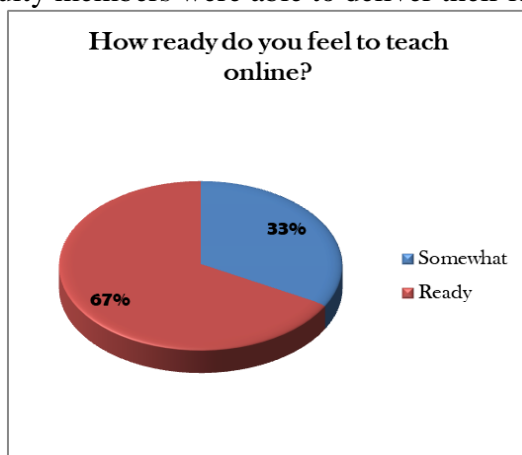
Digital communication

The majority of the faculty members participated in online workshops. After the stay-at-home order altered the work situation, and the workstation transitioned from university campus to home, only one faculty member attended a single workshop. The other members participated in more than three workshops, which were held either by Nazarbayev University or at other universities. They also participated in online conferences. The majority of faculty think online conferences saved a lot of time while some of them found participation in online conferences saves money. Eight participants preferred traditional face to face conferences since they felt comfortable to ask questions and believed that they could better network during face-to-face traditional conferences as well as other reasons. Eleven faculty members indicated that they also organized virtual online meetings with their family or friends. Faculty members spent more time on the Internet, and they are aware that the cultural codes of their society have been changing.

We will follow up with an interview to identify what are those. In this study we only tried to check how ready they were for ERT.

In the report with aggregated scores for the departments of the School of Science and Humanities for the fall of 2020, students evaluated teachers' help, which was presented with the average score as 04.27 out of 5.00 for the Department of KazLT which is a good indicator among thirteen departments of the school. This score was determined in accordance with the question "Q22 - 19." Students stated that instructors provided them clear guidance for online delivery of their work (e.g., technology requirements, available resources, and means of communication). We are planning to have interviews with the faculty to find out more details about their experiences in the future.

Digital commerce
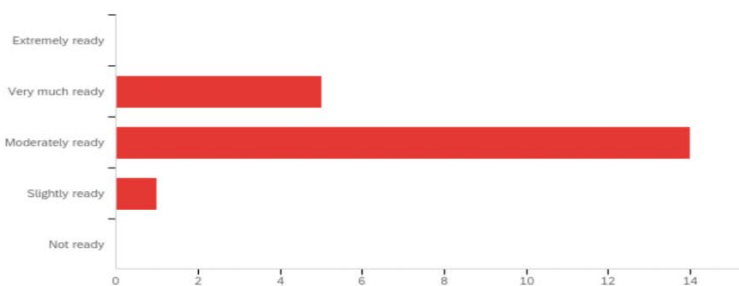
Do you feel that you are ready to be a member of digital age?

Several members of the department feel that they are not completely ready to be a member of digital world. Only five faculty members feel that they are ready to be a member of digital age. We asked another question to check the validity of the responses. The answers to the question revealed that only eleven faculty are confident to spend their money through online applications whereas the rest of them still like to carry cash.

**Digital Law, Right and Responsibilities**
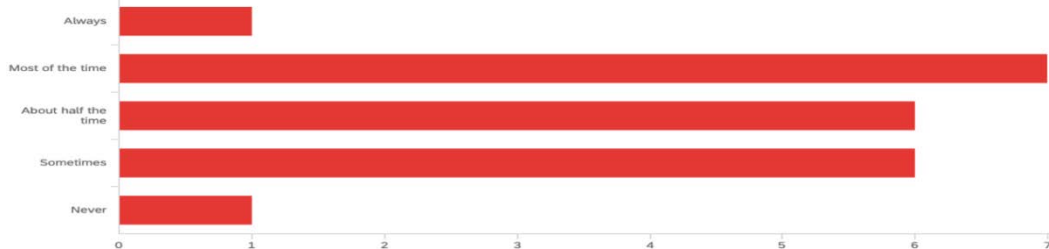
Do you record your synchronous classes?

During the ERT period, students and faculty have become forced members of an online community. There is a difference between an online community and a virtual community. According to Kindsmüller "online community members communicate only online as opposed to face-to-face (Kindsmüller, 2009). An online community is a group of people who freely interact and discuss using online communication. In any level of "interactivity, variety of communication, enjoyment, sustained membership, common values, socialization (Hunter, 2012, 18). Not all of them could be considered as imagined communities voluntarily connected through a common experiences and similar backgrounds (Anderson 1983). Online communities can differ in their audiences serving virtual friendship, health communities, business communities and learning communities. The Internet is such a great platform providing self-study or bringing people to free or paid classes that learner can choose. In such an environment,

instructors care less about the learner and the learner's interaction, but more about delivery. However, during the ERT students and faculty found themselves in an online community regulated by old fashioned conventional rules. Instructors were expected to create their own digital community and rules in accord with those of the university and the state. We will analyze the courses by using given letters in order to understand how ready faculty were for online teaching.

The instructor of Course A included a policy about cellphone and laptop usage under the title of "Social Media Usage." It was clearly stated that it was not allowed to take "images of their classmates" during the class hours. Making videos and posting them on the Internet was also not allowed. The course policy allowed students to share images on the Internet after having consent from the other parties if they made a project together. This policy included the instructor as well. The instructor of Course B did not include technical literacy and skills in the syllabus. When the ERT began the instructor included a new attendance policy which clearly emphasized the importance of being "polite in interactions with the instructor and other students." Course C and Course D included clarifications on online platforms through which the assignments would be submitted. The instructor specified particular days for asynchronous classes. Rules for online class attendance was provided. Online platforms for the course were listed and explained. Asynchronous classes were identified in the timetable. Course E did not have any statements about rules of online learning. Although the instructor conducted interviews with students, it was still not clear how they would be conducted in the syllabus. Course C, Course D and Course F all included online platforms, but they did not have any clear explanation how to use it when the ERT began. None of them have any information about wrongdoings or abusing someone's rights.

Health and Wellnesses:
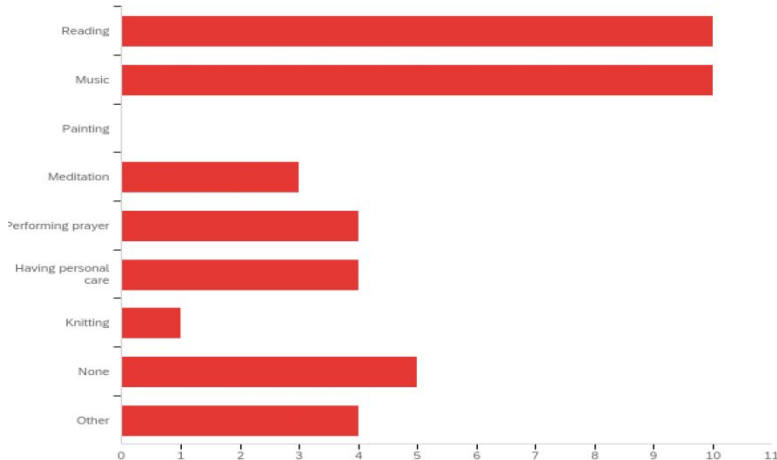
What do you do for your own well-being?

Digital health and wellness both refer to digital monitoring. During COVID-19 the university administration asked faculty to report themselves if they became sick because of COVID-19 or to report patients whom they knew. This sparked a discussion about the rights of the faculty. Since legal authorities such as states, institutions utilized digital monitoring, we are not going to discuss it in detail in this article.

For our purposes, digital health refers to the individual's well-being since remote teaching requires one to spend a lot of times in front of computers by sitting. During the COVID-19 pandemic ERT only two faculty members made specific time for themselves. For their physical and mental health, they chose to follow a diet, to go for a walk, to plant, to do

exercise. Faculty members either spent time by reading, listening to music, doing meditation, performing prayer, knitting, taking personal care and other activities.

Digital Security

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an ever-growing computer-centric lifestyle that includes a rapid influx of online platform tools into the classrooms. Accordingly, the COVID-19 pandemic forced other universities worldwide to move from face-to-face classes, conferences and in-person events and meetings into a virtual environment. The NU administration provided Moodle as a learning managements system and ZOOM for a meeting platform. For this purpose, the whole University uses ZOOM, the popular web and video conferencing service, to achieve the student outcomes with secure video communication services for hybrid classrooms as well as office hours. For delivering the online classes the Department of KazLT instructors preferred Zoom, and rarely mentioned other applications, such as Skype, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Hangouts and etc. Some faculty members did use different platforms such as Skype, Google Meet, Google Hangouts, BigBlueButton, WhatsApp. Nazarbayev University protected emails and Google Drive accounts connected to faculty's email. Digital security has not been an issue so far, but there are questions rising among the faculty such as sharing their materials, etc.

Teaching Philosophy

We sought the answer to the question "What have the instructors changed in their syllabi during the online teaching?" We found that the instructors offered flexible time for the office hour meetings with the students. We were immediately struck by the answer of what teachers had changed in their syllabi during the ERT each. Faculty ~~were~~ made themselves more available online to provide support when it was needed by adding an option to make appointments for office hours on their syllabi. Additionally, when NU began teaching ERT, faculty members of the Department of KazLT had met with their students and practiced online platforms to connect with their students before classes started. We would like to share some statements from students' feedback, which is taken from the students' evaluation of the Course J:

- "Simple communication during Zoom meetings helped my progress."

- "We took various online quizzes and participated in online office hours."

- "Live communication was really vibrant in this blurry online study."

- "In the beginning, we had problems understanding the tasks or the curriculum, but the instructor was always ready to help, to clarify and direct us to what was really helpful."

We can conclude that office hours during the ERT fostered important "critical connections" between student, instructor, and material by providing an opportunity to get to know one another—not for the sake of personal relationships, but to create "a positive and productive working relationship" (Kreizinger, 2006).

Learning Outcome

Learning outcomes remained the same in Course C and Course D during the ERT while instructors of the Course D included only the statement that "Students will be able to communicate successfully for academic purposes in various type of online platforms." One of the faculty of the Course E included the learning outcome "conducting research, communication through online learning technologies and online platforms." Faculty of the Course F included the statement: "Students will be able to improve their research skills, able to develop digital technology literacy and communicate effectively in digital platforms." During the emergency teaching period in April 2020 and later on, faculty focused more on students' research skills, and

developing students' digital literacy since they expected students to do more self-study and do research by themselves by using Internet technologies. Faculty of Course G did not emphasize any learning outcome related to online teaching. We think that Course G needs to be reorganized based on digital needs and skills of the students. Faculty of the Course H did not make any changes during emergency online teaching. The faculty of the Course B made the following changes. The instructor added new objectives focusing on online learning such as engaging relevant historical cultural and socio linguistic ~~the~~ information in electronic formats and demonstrating technological skills. Finally, we chose one course of Turkic studies. The faculty did not change learning outcomes. Instead, many assessments were added using digital technologies such as online quizzes, recorded individual and group presentations, virtual tours and creating maps in online platforms as well as conducting podcasts.
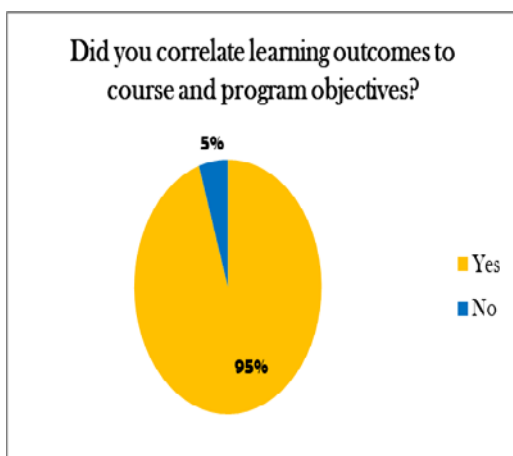
Tools

We also sought to answer of the question "What kind of tools, platforms and apps did the instructors use in online classes?" We first listed all online tools/ platforms/applications used by the Department of KazLT faculty. Then we grouped them according to the purpose of the synchronous or asynchronous teaching process in a virtual class. Some tools/ applications were found effective for online presentations, and in delivering the content of the lecture, with a graphic program that allow instructors to create engaging content and to communicate with them effectively, or to increase the interest of the audience. For this purpose, the faculty have been using mostly Prezi, PowerPoint, Padlet, Google Docs, Sutori. The next group of online tools/apps, which the faculty used for collaboration, were websites and applications, such as Facebook, Google Drive, Viber, WhatsApp, Telegram chat, and Instagram. These platforms enabled them to create and share content or participate in social networking and improve communication between instructors and students. The next tools and apps were for conducting online quizzes, as they are now a more encouraging type of testing remote learning. All faculty of KazLT were already familiar with online assessments such as Kahoot, Trinity, Quizzes, Quizalize, Google Form, and Socrative, as they had used them before the COVID-19 pandemic. The advantage of those Internet based tools is that the results come very fast so that students and instructor can have immediate feedback. Faculty developed assessments based on the learning material, evaluate students' skills via quizzes, and tests. Students could see the results of their responses immediately. Thomas (2014) claimed that with Kahoot, an otherwise sleepy, uninspiring class can turn into an active, highly charged group of students eager to absorb and excel.

It showed with the average score 4.42 out of 5.00 which is a second place among other 13 departments of the school in the report with aggregated scores for the departments of the

School of science and humanity for the Fall of 2020. This score was determined in accordance with the question: "Q9 - 3. The learning technologies (eg. video - conferencing, podcasting, presentation software, and multimedia materials) were useful in helping me to achieve the learning outcomes." It illustrated that the faculty of KazLT were able to master the principles and techniques of design using online creation tools, platforms, and applications appropriately, and have created good content in remote teaching.

Assessments in Syllabi

We also sought the answer to the question: "What has changed [in the syllabi] in conducting classes before and during the COVID teaching philosophy training?" Derek Rowntree (1977) determined that assessments provided feedback for getting to know our students and the quality of their learning. One of the main issues that changed in the ERT period was the acceptance and adaptation of assessments, tasks and rubrics. Weekly tests, quizzes, and writing exercises, formative methods of assessment, were most often used before ERT as formative assessments. Summative assessments that determine how the students use the information to construct their ideas that they learned during entire semester were suggested by the university administration in Spring 2020. We now consider assessments as feedback from the students in order to improve students' performance. It can be said that the instructors are trying to adapt to the new conditions so that students become more involved in the online learning process. They gain confidence in what they are expected to learn and how the students can achieve the learning outcomes of the courses. Projects, essays, and research articles appeared on the syllabi during the ERT.

The main points of the assessment of what the instructors have changed in their syllabi:

1. The instructors revisited and changed the assessments that they already used and deployed a variety of methods for assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Changing the assessment type into the online format meant that instructors redesigned and tried to engaged students in online assessments by using Internet technologies and tools. Using communication technologies made immediate feedback available from the students as the result of the communication between the instructor and students.

2. The traditional exams were replaced by the time-limited online exams. The exam questions were created on different educational platforms, such as Quizlet in Moodle, Google forms, and students took the online exams in a limited amount of time comparable to the original exam time limit.

3. One of the effective and quick assessing techniques was to create multiple-choice questions. There are various platforms for that purpose, such as Quizzes, Quizezliza, Kahoot, Trinity, and others. The analyses of syllabi showed that the instructors used these tools to check the students' achievement, to assess whether students were keeping up with the content in a weekly manner or after each module of the syllabi.

4. Lastly, the faculty have moved from the traditional oral exam to the course paper, where students were expected to be able to reproduce the course outcomes in a fourteen-week period. The course papers required students to identify, compare, contrast, and critically reflect in the Kazakh language upon major theoretical perspectives/approaches in the field of the chosen topic of the course paper. According to the course objectives, the faculty have started to assign their students several types of summative online take-home assessments in line with the topic of the assignment, such as to simply set a conventional take-home assignment. For example, the faculty of the Course J had assigned students with written, and oral essays that gave students,

potentially, several weeks to complete each task, while they deepened their knowledge on the chosen topic.

Conclusion

During the rapidly changing globalization, it is impossible to imagine educational processes at the university without digitalization. This was one of the main requirements of NU's mission. The achievement of Nazarbayev University's mission of developing and maintaining academic achievement was facilitated by the use of various online tools, the number of which has grown enormously, and they have become indispensable resources during ERT. As for Ribble's argument that students are natives of the digital world and teachers are immigrants, we do not fully agree with this statement, since the faculty of KazLT were not alienated from the digital world. Since the transition was so rapid and it was ambiguous when the ERT would end, some of the faculty members were not able to adjust themselves. Almost half of the faculty, however, proved that they are able to lead students and be a part of this "new normal" condition during the transition period.

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