A. Abzalbekkyzy iD

Eurasian technological university, Kazakhstan, Almaty
*e-mail: a.abzalbekkyzy@etu.edu.kz

ONLINE TEACHING OF ENGLISH: VOICES OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN KAZAKHSTAN

The purpose of this study is to get a better understanding of the benefits and drawbacks associated with online learning and teaching in Kazakhstani universities as well as to know teachers' and students' attitudes towards online learning/teaching English. The responses of the 100 students and 30 teachers were studied to reveal how teachers and students perceive the educational quality of the sudden shift from face-to-face to online teaching/learning English. The study finds a statistically significant association between students' satisfaction with the quality of education and the level of teachers' preparedness to deliver English lessons online. Data were collected through online questionnaires (Google form) that have been shared through social media such as WhatsApp and Telegram. Participants were given open-ended, closed-ended, and linear scale questions. The survey participants were university teachers and students. According to the survey, the attitudes of teachers and students towards online learning English are more positive than negative. So, the survey outcomes can significantly help to improve the quality of online lessons. The results of this study will be useful for teachers of higher educational institutions, and anyone who is interested in teaching English online.

Key words: online learning/teaching, higher education, pandemic, survey, questionnaire, online learning platforms.

А. Абзалбекқызы

Еуразия технологиялық университеті, Қазақстан, Алматы қ.
*e-mail: a.abzalbekkyzy@etu.edu.kz

Ағылшын тілін онлайн оқыту: қазақстан студенттері мен оқытушыларының дауыстары

Аталған зерттеудің мақсаты – Қазақстандық университеттерде онлайн форматында оқу мен оқытудың артықшылықтары мен кемшіліктерін жақсырақ түсініп, оқытушылар мен білімгерлердің ағылшын тілін онлайн меңгеруге/оқытуға деген жалпы көзқарастарын анықтау. Сауалнамаға қатысқан 100 білімгер пен 30 оқытушының жауаптары олардың ағылшын тілін күндізгі оқытудан онлайн форматына кенеттен көшу кезіндегі білім сапасына деген көзқарастарын көрсетеді. Өткізілген зерттеу нәтижесінде білімгерлердің білім сапасымен қанағаттануы мен оқытушылардың ағылшын тілі сабақтарын онлайн форматта өткізуге дайындық деңгейі арасындағы статистикалық маңызды байланыс анықталды. Деректерді жинау үшін WhatsApp және Telegram секілді әлеуметтік желілер арқылы таратылған онлайн сауалнама (Google forms) қолданылды. Қатысушыларға ашық, жабық және желілік сұрақтардан тұратын онлайн сауалнамаға (Google forms) жауап беру ұсынылды. Сауалнамаға жоғары оқу орындарының оқытушылары мен білімгерлері қатысты. Сауалнамаға сәйкес, оқытушылар мен білімгерлердің ағылшын тілін онлайн режимінде оқуға деген көзқарастары көбіне оң. Осылайша, сауалнама нәтижелері онлайн сабақтардың сапасын жақсартуға айтарлықтай септігін тигізеді. Бұл зерттеудің нәтижелері жоғары оқу орындарының оқытушыларына, сондай-ақ ағылшын тілін онлайн форматында өткізуге қызығушылық танытқандарға пайдалы болады.

Түйін сөздер: онлайн оқу/оқыту, жоғары білім, пандемия, сауалнама, сұрақ-жауап, онлайн білім беру платформалары.

А. Абзалбеккызы

Евразийский технологический университет, Казахстан, г. Алматы
*e-mail: a.abzalbekkyzy@etu.edu.kz

Онлайн преподавание английского языка: голоса студентов и преподавателей в Казахстане

Целью исследования является выявление преимуществ и недостатков онлайн обучения в казахстанских университетах, а также определение отношения преподавателей и студентов к онлайн преподаванию/изучению английского языка. Ответы 100 опрошенных студентов и 30

преподавателей показали, как преподаватели и студенты воспринимают качество образования при внезапном переходе от очного обучения к онлайн обучению английского языка. Исследование выявило статистически значимую связь между удовлетворенностью студентов качеством образования и уровнем подготовки преподавателей к проведению уроков английского языка в онлайн формате. Для сбора данных было использовано онлайн анкетирование (Google форма), которое было распространено через такие социальные сети, как WhatsApp и Telegram. Онлайн анкетирование состояло из открытых, закрытых и линейных вопросов. В опросе приняли участие преподаватели и студенты вузов. Согласно опросу, отношение преподавателей и студентов к онлайн обучению английскому языку скорее положительное, чем отрицательное. Данные этого опроса могут существенно улучшить качество онлайн уроков английского языка. Результаты исследования будут полезны преподавателям высших учебных заведений, и тем, кто интересуется преподаванием английского языка онлайн.

Ключевые слова: онлайн обучение/преподавание, высшее образование, пандемия, опрос, анкетирование, платформы для онлайн обучения.

Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was the beginning of a global crisis that affected all aspects of life. According to UNESCO, because of the pandemic situation schools were closed in 191 countries of the world, and more than 1.5 billion students switched to distance education (UNESCO Report, 2020:1) [1].

In 2020, Kazakh universities faced the need to implement the educational process mainly in the distance form. Students work online at home, with classes held in real-time, it is available to use online technological devices (computer, webcam, etc.) and video conferencing platforms (Zoom, Skype, Google meet, etc.).

The history of distance learning goes back to the 18th century, when "correspondent education" appeared thanks to regular and affordable postal communication. Later, in 1969, the first world distance learning university, the Open University was opened in the UK. The 20th century was marked by the invention of the radio and television, which significantly changed distance education opportunities. A noticeable development of distance education occurred in the 1960s after the signing of a memorandum with UNESCO when it received international recognition and assistance (Petkova, 2015:200) [2]. Distance education received a new powerful impetus only in the 1980-1990s with the appearance of personal computers in wide access, as well as with the development of the Internet.

In 1999, in the Law "On Education", distance education in Kazakhstan was defined as a form of education. In general, educational institutions in Kazakhstan adhere to the British model of distance learning. But in that time distance learning involved sending training materials via mail, today, thanks to the development of technology, this process takes place via the Internet, Skype, or different video platforms.

Of course, teaching English online using the Internet was conducted before the pandemic situation, and sometimes very actively. The problem is that today we are not talking about using the internet, but that almost all teaching has been carried out via the Internet. The planning and implementation of online teaching are very different from formal education. It takes weeks to design an effective online lesson (Ramola, 2020a:30).

The new situation that developed during the pandemic not only created many problems in the higher education system but also revealed the necessary directions for its development related to the use of distance learning technologies. Scientists consider the pandemic situation as an opportunity to develop new teaching methods and improve the educational base. The pandemic changed the traditional structure of the higher education system all over the globe (Ramola, 2020b:29) [3]. The transition to online learning quickly had a serious impact on teachers and students. Because of the immediate beginning of online education, there was little time to solve problems connected to transition. The main problem was the lack of access to high-speed Internet at home, which made lessons difficult to deliver. Furthermore, responses to the survey conducted for this article indicated that many students hadn't access to electronic technology (such as laptops, computers, and web cameras) at home. Also, not all students of a non-linguistic university have technological literacy, so, during the pandemic, the problem of "digital inequality" was realized. Additionally, lots of teachers did not have sufficient technological literacy to produce effective content or adapt it to online teaching. Rapid developments in technology have made distance education easy (McBrien, 2009:1) [4]. "Most of the terms (online learn-

ing, open learning, web-based learning, computer-mediated learning, blended learning, m-learning, for ex.) have in common the ability to use a computer connected to a network, that offers the possibility to learn from anywhere, anytime, in any rhythm, with any means" (Cojocariu, 2014:1999) [5].

Obviously, among the advantages of using ICT in comparison with traditional full-time education, it is worth mentioning such benefits as 1. Flexibility (some types of work can be done outside the classroom). 2. Reduction of transport and time costs. 3. The possibility of organizing practical classes, consultations, tests, and exams, testing both individually and in a group. Among the qualitative changes, it is worth mentioning such features as platforms for conducting online classes in videoconferencing mode (Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, etc.), the use of interactive whiteboards, online tests, games (for example Quizlet, Google Forms, Jamboard, JeopardyLabs, Socrative, etc.). Online testing platforms, such as Google forms, and Socrative, allow teachers to quickly get test results in automatic mode and help students to increase their self-esteem and motivation. In addition, certain types of individual tasks can be done with the help of audio and video recordings.

The purpose of the study is to examine the benefits and drawbacks associated with online learning and teaching in Kazakhstani universities as well as to know teachers' and students' opinions on using the online learning system.

Methodological approaches

The research uses a qualitative method of collecting and interpreting the data. According to Sharan B. Merriam and Robin S. Grenier, "qualitative research is designed to understand the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives" (Merriam, 2019:6) [6]. The subjects of this research are English teachers and students of higher education institutions.

Results and discussion

The responses of the 100 students and 30 teachers were studied to construct several regression models to better understand how teachers and students perceive the educational quality of online teaching/learning English. I must note that survey participants were university teachers and students. The study finds a statistically significant associa-

tion between students' satisfaction with the quality of education and the level of teachers' readiness to switch to the online learning format. Data were collected through online questionnaires (Google form) that have been shared through social media such as Whatsapp, and Telegram. Google Forms are a quick way to create an online survey where the answers are collected in an online spreadsheet (Wolber, 2012) [7]. According to Ian Brace, the questionnaire is to gather the information necessary to enable the respondents to respond to the purpose of the survey (Brace, 2008:7) [8]. Participants were given open-ended, closed-ended, and linear scale questions. Students and teachers had different questionnaires.

Questionnaire for teachers:

1. How did you adapt to home-based online classes?

1. poor 2. 3. 4. 5. very good

2. What kind of online English learning platforms do you use? (You may choose more than one answer)

Zoom

Google Classroom

Moodle

Google Meet

Whatsapp

Other (Please specify)

3. What technical difficulties (lack of Internet, laptop, or phone) do you face during online teaching English?

4. Is it convenient for you to teach online? What exactly is convenient and inconvenient?

Yes, please specify.

No, please specify.

Other (Please specify)

Questionnaire for students.

1. How did you adapt to home-based online classes?

1. poor 2. 3. 4. 5. very good

2. What types of devices do you use for online learning?

Personal Computer

Laptop

Tablet

Mobile phone

Other (Please specify)

3. What technical difficulties (lack of Internet, laptop, or phone) do you face during online learning English?

4. Is it convenient for you to learn English online?

Yes, please specify.

No, please specify.
Other (Please specify)

5. Are you satisfied with the quality of online English classes? What exactly are you satisfied/dissatisfied with?

Yes, please specify.

No, please specify.

6. Would you like to continue learning English online in the future?

Yes/No/ Maybe.

The coronavirus pandemic has forced teachers and students to use new technologies and quickly adapt to unfamiliar teaching methods. So, adaptation was successful not for all students and teachers. The first question is: **How did you adapt to home-based online classes?**

According to the data, 32% of teachers and 25% of students indicated that difficulties arose in the process of adaptation; 25% of teachers and 30% of students adapted very well.
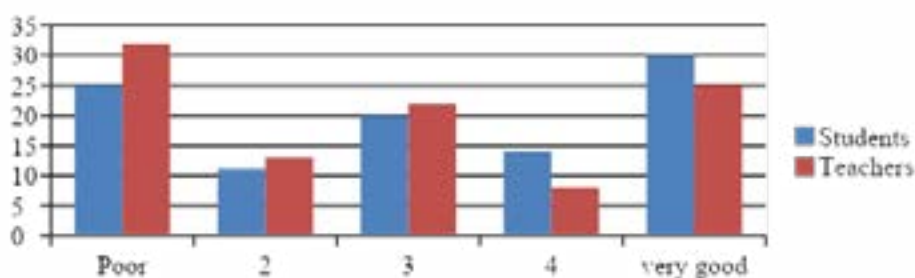

Figure 1 – The level of adaption to home-based online classes

In the second question, a researcher wants to know which online learning platform is used mostly at the lesson by teachers. The second question is: **What kind of online English learning platforms do you use?** The results are shown below:
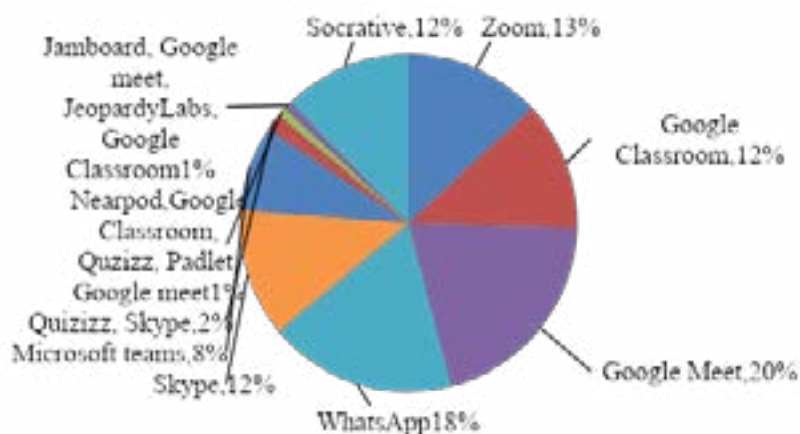

Figure 2 – Online learning system in teaching English.

Figure 2 above shows that from 30 respondents, 16 teachers or 13% use Zoom, 15 respondents or 12% use Google classroom, 25 respondents or 20% use Google Meet, 22 respondents 18% use WhatsApp, 15 respondents or 12% use Skype, 10 respondents or 8% use Microsoft teams, 1% or 2 respondents use Quizizz and Skype, 1 respondent or 1% use Nearpod, Google Classroom, Quizizz, Padlet, Google meet, Jamboard, JeopardyLabs, 12% use Socrative and no one uses Moodle. According to the data, English teachers use mainly Zoom, WhatsApp, Google meet, Google Classroom, and Skype plat-

forms for delivering online classes. Google Classroom is a Learning Management System (LMS) offered by Google to the teachers which provides the place to communicate with the students/learners, give materials, questions, and assignments (Zhang, 2016:18) [9].

The pandemic situation in Kazakhstan has exposed several problems related to online/ distant education. The most impactful problem is a lack of technological resources. Thus, in the third question, the researcher wants to know which technological equipment is usually used for online classes by students. The third question is: What types of devices do you use for online learning?

According to the data, Kazakhstani students mostly use computers/laptops and mobile phones in the education process. The most actively used technological device is the mobile phone 48%, whereas 52% use computer/laptop regularly. During the survey was revealed that many students don't have laptops or computers. The fourth question: What technical difficulties (lack of Internet, laptop, or phone) do you face during online learning/teaching English? Along with the lack of technological devices, 90 percent of respondents indicated that they face the problem of a slow internet connection in Kazakhstan. Also, 25 percent of students answered that they haven't got computers or laptops. Additionally, 9 percent of respondents noted that they face some difficulties in using technological devices.

Next question: **Is it convenient for you to teach online? What exactly is convenient and inconvenient?** 28 percent of respondents indicated that it is convenient to teach online and here is the description of their opinions:

A. Large number of tools, such as Quizizz, Jamboard, Padlet, Jeopardylabs, etc. can be used at the lesson.

B. Online teaching reduces financial costs, such as transportation, and lunch. Also, Students can take the test online, which saves testing time and printing costs. Moreover, it reduces printing costs for handouts. So, paperless teaching is also beneficial to the environment.

C. Teachers don't need to be at a specific place, at a specific time, they can teach from their comfort zone at home.

23 percent of respondents indicated the inconvenience of online teaching. Here is the description of their opinions:

A. The key problem of online education is internet access.

B. Using online technologies is challenging. There are lots of English teaching resources, which require time for sorting and deciding which one is more efficient for the purpose of the lesson. So, online teaching requires a basic understanding of digital technology.

C. Lack of physical interaction. Most teachers answered that they feel isolated, and emphasized the importance and necessity of real communication.

D. Physical problems due to staying lots of hours in front of computers. So, due to online work, vision deteriorated and back pain appeared.

E. Also, in online teaching it is difficult to organize such activities as speaking (dialogs), listening, peer, and group work.

49 percent of respondents have chosen the option "other' and indicated that online teaching has both conveniences and inconveniences. Here is the description of their opinions:

A. Online teaching is flexible, it saves time and transportation costs. But it limits physical communication.

B. Teachers also indicated that free ZOOM sessions have 40 minutes restriction, which is inconvenient for university teachers as the average lesson duration is 70- 80 minutes. Some teachers use Google Meet, but this platform hasn't got free breakout rooms. For getting access to breakout rooms you need to pay the subscription fee. Breakout rooms are necessary for organizing peer and group work. So, these platforms are convenient for those who have subscriptions.

C. Despite the effectiveness of online testing platforms, it is difficult to control students; some of them may cheat during the tests.

Students had the same question: **Is it convenient for you to learn English online? They indicated mostly the same conveniences and inconveniences as teachers in answering this question.**

21 percent of respondents indicated that it is convenient to learn online, 40 percent indicated the inconvenience of online learning, and 39 percent said that it has both conveniences and inconveniences. Here is the description of their opinions:

A. Online learning is convenient for combining work and study.

B. Online learning reduces costs for study materials.

C. Online learning cannot replace face-to-face teaching. Traditional classes are more effective in improving English.

D. You can study at home, at any time.

E. Because of a weak internet connection, you may not do the listening tasks or sometimes you may not hear what the teacher is saying.

F. It is convenient for me to study online, but I would prefer an offline format because I do not always have a stable network. And also in an offline format, information is perceived faster and discipline is present.

G. Yes, it saves time.

H. No, I would like to study offline.

The next question in the survey is: **Are you satisfied with the quality of online English classes? What exactly are you satisfied/dissatisfied with?**

According to the survey, 42 percent of respondents are dissatisfied, whereas 58 percent of respondents are satisfied with the quality of online English classes. Here is the description of their opinions:

A. In general, I am satisfied with the quality of online English classes.

B. Yes, she explains well.

C. No.

D. Yes, we have an educated teacher.

E. Yes, very convenient!

F. In general, the classes are going very well. The teacher is good and clearly explains the topics.

G. Yes, the teacher explains everything in detail.

H. 50/50

I. Yes. I do not know the rest, but our teacher delivers each lesson efficiently.

J. No, I want to study offline.

K. Yes, sure. But the only disadvantage is that in practice we cannot improve our speaking skills.

L. NO, I am not satisfied. I would like to change the teacher.

M. I am not fully satisfied because of the overuse of WhatsApp.

N. We do not have enough practice in English.

The last question in the survey is: **Would you like to continue learning English online in the future?**
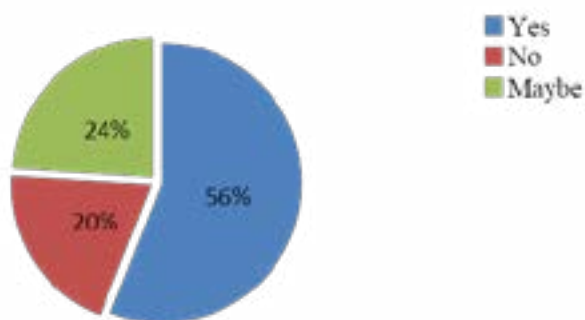

Figure 3 – Students' responses to the question "Would you like to continue learning English online?"

Figure 3 above shows that from 100 respondents 56 percent would like to continue studying English online, 20 percent would not like to study English online, 24 percent chose the option "Maybe". So, these results show that most students are positive about online learning. However, a scientist from the UK Kevin Williams thinks the lack of real personal interaction can lead to serious pedagogical losses; can make it difficult to read body language cues, as well as makes it harder to achieve emotional connection that often features in the mediation between teachers, learners and a body of knowledge" says (Williams, 2020:1217) [10].

Conclusion

We are used to comparing online and traditional face-to-face learning/teaching. Over the past decades, scientists have repeatedly tried to measure which of the formats is better. Today, many people agree that it is incorrect to compare online and offline education. Both formats have their undeniable advantages, and the result depends on the context, subject, objectives, as well as personal characteristics of the student.

According to the analysis, the attitudes of English teachers and students towards online learning English are more positive than negative. The study revealed vital components that have a huge influence on the quality of the lesson, they are high-speed internet, students' access to the Internet and technological equipment, as well as the teachers' ability to create learning materials and deliver online lessons effectively. In general, research revealed that delivering English lessons online requires improvement in technological as well as in pedagogical terms. The survey showed that there are weak points, and most of them are the consequences of insufficient preparedness of the educational system in the country. It is necessary to note that in order to continue online education it is crucial to extend high-speed Internet access across the country and provide students with the necessary technical equipment. So, the internet and other technological infrastructure should not be a luxury; rather they ought to be used to uplift economically disadvantaged families. In addition, some respondents noted that online education helped them financially, as it reduces costs for study materials as well as transportation. So, both students and teachers like the simplicity, financial attractiveness, and entertainment of this format of learning in comparison with traditional

face-to-face education. Today, teaching/learning English via the Internet is the most innovative and interesting way of organizing the educational process. Learning English online is not only popular but also convenient. However, some students were critical of their teachers, mainly, because of the overuse of WhatsApp, and insufficient practice of speaking skills in the lesson. According to the study results, teachers mainly use Google Meet, Zoom, and WhatsApp platforms for delivering online English classes. They also noted the lack of live communication, which is the main drawback of an online format.

The online education market is very diverse – there are lots of educational platforms, educational mobile applications, games, and tools for video conferencing, video lessons, etc. Now, it doesn't make

sense to ask "Which one is more effective?". It is more important to understand: "How to combine these formats and tools correctly to achieve the best result?". Thus, at first, teachers have to spend a little time and effort to develop the necessary skills to deliver lessons effectively online. It is also very significant for the teacher to be able to move away from traditional teaching models toward more interactive methods.

Obviously, Kazakhstan cannot go back to the way it once was, before the quarantine, because due to the pandemic situation in the world there were discovered some advantages of moving work and study online, so now we have a great opportunity to significantly improve the education system by making it more innovative and accessible for everyone.

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