



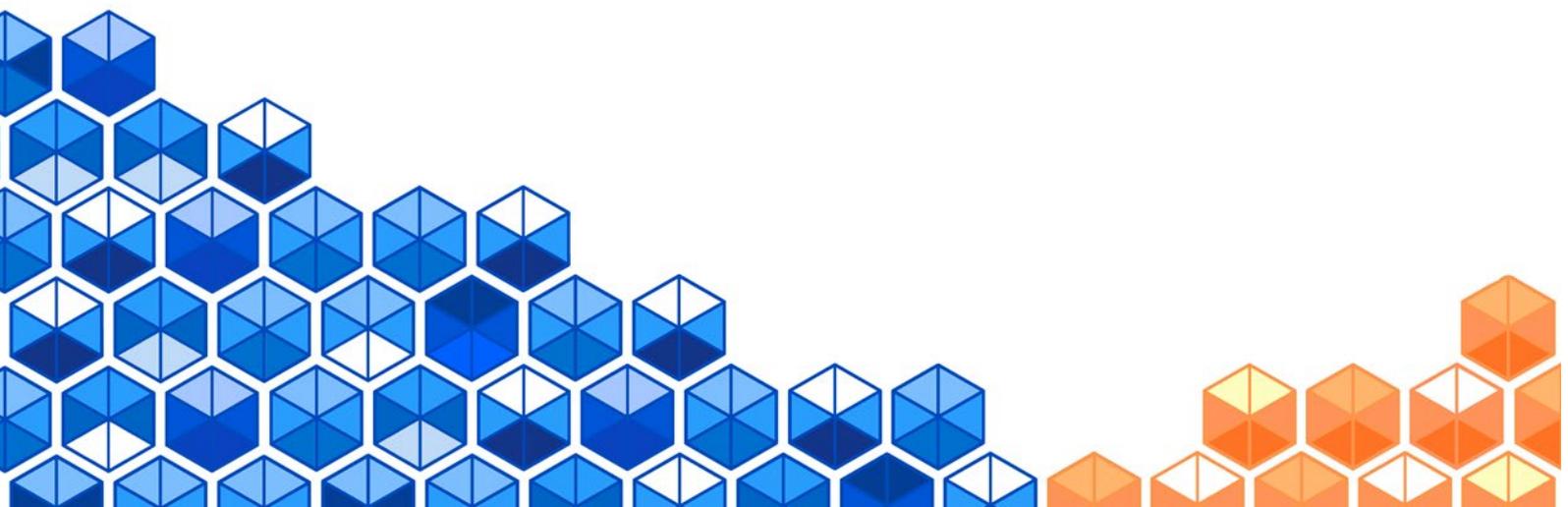
IQAA

**INDEPENDENT AGENCY
FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION – IQAA**

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

**“The activity of Kazakhstani universities
in the context of complying standards and guidelines
for quality assurance in the European Higher Education area”**

Nur-Sultan, 2022





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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic impact on Kazakhstani HEIs varies from region to region. Nevertheless, the general direction of changes can be clearly traced: the pandemic has put universities in a difficult position, forcing them to change and direct resources to fast-tracked digitalization. HEIs had to tackle many challenges in a short time: which pathways of distance learning to choose; which communication means to use; how to evaluate the student progress, etc.

This thematic analysis studies HEIs in Kazakhstan in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The subject is the actions and measures HEIs have taken in order to ensure compliance with the standards for internal quality assurance (ESG Part 1):

- 1.3 Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment
- 1.6 Learning resources and student support

The primary data is drawn from the institutional review reports of 12 universities, out of total 30, accredited by the IQAA in 2019-2021 (Appendix 1). As a result of analyzing the external review reports and other reference sources, the main trends in the development of distance education (commendations and areas of improvement) were identified.

HEI processes and the information management system

The transition of students and university staff to a remote work mode has significantly improved the effectiveness of measures to counter the spread of coronavirus. Most universities have redesigned processes, maintaining the involvement of students in educational activity: students interacted with teachers, carried out learning tasks and projects. To great extent, it would not have been possible without information management systems.

In the context of the pandemic, the role of information systems in the academic and methodological support of the learning process has increased. Most HEIs use Platonus and Univer 2.0 (Kazakh University of Technology and Business, Kazakhstan University of Engineering and Technology, Almaty Management University, Kazakh-American Free University, Syrdarya University, South Kazakhstan State Pedagogical University, Caspian Public University).

The "Platonus" provides incorporated database, comprises all processes in the university, ensures the efficiency of university management. It works as a "one stop point" for students and teaching staff to access all learning and data resources of the university: documents explaining the university's policies; the results of students' academic performance, schedule, learning information, rules and procedures of the university. The platform also supports data collection, monitoring and handling the information about student achievements. As part of the "Platonus", a proctoring system has been introduced in a number of universities for online exams and evaluation.

Some universities use their own designed platforms and data systems. The Kazakh-British Technical University has an internal network of Uninet. At I. Zhansugurov Zhetysu State University (Zhetysu University) the enrollment process of students and teachers for disciplines are carried out in the SmartZhetiSU information system. Other HEIs such as International Educational Corporation and Satbayev Kazakh National Research Technical University (Satbayev University) use their own information platforms.

There are universities which have successfully integrated several information systems. Satbayev University provides 2 corporate remote platforms: the Polytechonline platform in Moodle

and the Microsoft 365 platform. Both systems are integrated with each other and allow users to share learning information in the corporate cloud.

The Caspian Public University has integrated the university's Caspidot platform.kz and AIS "Univer 2.0". Integration helps to ensure availability of information and services online. The student's personal account contains learning programs with information, syllabuses, and principles of academic integrity. Methodological support of the educational process (academic calendar and schedule of classes and exams) is automated and uploaded in the Univer system and on the university website.

Organization of the educational process

The ZOOM system is very popular for lectures and practical classes. Universities also use Microsoft Teams, Cisco Webex and their own platforms. In general, it can be noted that most universities have successfully adapted to the transition to distance education due to the fact that some universities have already offered such service to certain groups of students. Universities' own designed and elaborated platforms were used until 2020, and the pandemic only fostered universities to innovate.

Analysis of university practices shows that during the distance learning several modes of organizing educational activities have developed:

- asynchronous (students study the course content at a convenient time, in accordance with the deadline set by the teacher)
- synchronous (simultaneous participation in the class, for example, during a webinar)
- mixed (interaction of synchronous and asynchronous, depending on teaching tasks).

The technologies of distance learning make it possible to make visual information vivid and dynamic, to support the educational process, taking into account the active interaction of the student within the learning system.

At the Kazakh University of Technology and Business, all students participated in a distance format: more than 3,000 video lectures were developed and posted on the author's YouTube channel. The Kazakh-American Free University has been practicing video lectures since the 2017-2018 academic year (in the "Video Library" section on the university website and on YouTube channel), as well as using webinars in teaching. At the Caspian Public University, all lecture materials are uploaded to the classroom in the student personal account in the form of presentations, videos and lecture abstracts. In the International Educational Corporation the learning process is implemented through the web-portals www.elearning.kazgasa.kz and www.elearning.kau.kz.

As to Satbayev University, all students have personal accounts on Polytechonline.kz and Microsoft 365 Education platforms. The system contains a database of 1254 video courses, a total of 18,810 video files. The Polytech Online database contains multilingual courses that are available to students 24/7 and without limiting number of views.

When preparing for classes, students and teaching staff actively use library resources. Zhetysu University provides access to the university library through the KADIS system and other information resources. In 2019, the South Kazakhstan State Pedagogical University acquired the Aknurpress digital library (1351 textbooks and teaching manuals in Kazakh, Russian and English), and since June 2020, the university has provided access to the Smart-Kitap online electronic library. However, as an area for improvement, the level of automation for the provision of library services

needs to be further developed in a number of universities, since not all services are provided online and promptly.

Support for students and teaching staff

During the pandemic the support services in HEIs also switched to distance mode: virtual reception rooms of vice-rectors, deans and other main departments were launched, consultations were held by phone and e-mail. At the Kazakh-British Technical University (KBTU), the Career Center held online coworking events aimed at the employment of graduates. Since April 2020, students have been taught online how to create resume, pass interviews and also have taken part in workshops by KBTU partner companies.

By far, the pandemic has affected teaching, learning and the organization of practice that led to take prompt measures in adequate training of teaching staff and students. Thus, at Satbayev University, the adjustment of teachers to remote platforms was fostered by a series of training classes, as well as through online consultation and technical support. All universities have HelpDesk system that provides technical support to students and teachers.

In order to promptly solve the problems of students and teaching staff, universities have a system for monitoring the quality of services, including questionnaires on online learning, student satisfaction surveys (Satbayev University, KBTU, etc.).

Ensuring academic integrity

HE policies in promoting academic integrity turned out to be particularly vulnerable in the context of distance learning. Universities use the proctoring system for intermediate and final examination procedures, and also ensure that all written works of students are checked for uniqueness through anti-plagiarism systems (KBTU, Syrdarya University, Satbayev University, etc.).

In the context of the pandemic, universities have adopted requirements for online examination: identification of the person (remote, automatic), recording of the process (continuity, time limit), storing records and event logs.

Developing Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)

As the analysis of external review reports proved, most universities are recommended to develop a system of massive open online courses (MOOCs).

According to the “Report on the implementation of the Bologna process in the Kazakhstani universities” by The Center of the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility of the Ministry of Education and Science, Satbayev University was recognized as the leader in developing massive open online courses. Satbayev University has developed 400 massive open online courses in 2020 (28% of the total number of online courses of all universities in Kazakhstan). Rudnensky Industrial Institute (263 courses) and KIMEP University (246 courses) were also among the three leaders who provided the content of distance education during the pandemic.

In Almaty Management University, students can access free MOOC courses through the Open AlmaU platform. The University has received 650 licenses for free training and obtaining

MOOC certificates on the Coursera platform which covers about 20% of the total student population and teaching staff.

The analysis of the external review reports confirms that the number of universities (Kazakh University of Technology and Business, Syrdarya University, S.Amanzholov East Kazakhstan State University, Kazakh-American Free University) are recommended to create and implement MOOCs. Thus, the development and implementation of MOOCs should be considered as an area for improving the HEIs activity.

Facilities, equipment and resources

In order to support distance education and online classes, universities use digital technology and relevant equipment (laptops, graphic tablets to demonstrate formulas and handwritten text in the conditions of remote multimedia materials and to create their own content, a number of universities use equipment for video and audio recording, photography). For the purpose of collective and remote work with information resources, network technology is used, as well as equipment for the formation of a single information space and access to global and other telecommunication networks.

At the Kazakh University of Technology and Business which is focused on technical and technological specialties, the on-campus learning process is provided with facilities and equipment (Laboratory), however, according to the external review report, there are not enough virtual laboratories in core disciplines of educational programs. Almaty Management University has a modern level of facilities, equipment and resources to provide high-quality educational services, including a laboratory for video recording of lectures and online communication. Zhetysu University has installed special equipment "Dilear Distance Learning" in classrooms for distance learning.

The scope of partnerships and interuniversity cooperation

The pandemic had a negative impact on international cooperation in education, science and research: international trips were canceled, exchange programs and academic mobility of students and teachers, as well as scientific cooperation programs were suspended.

On the other hand, a number of HEIs have transited their partnership to distance mode, many HEIs have started searching for new interaction in a digital environment to maintain communication, solve joint tasks and problems, search for optimal solutions for all parties (joint online conferences, online seminars and workshops, etc.).

As areas of improvement, universities were recommended to develop international cooperation, create joint master programs with top universities and increase the number of foreign academic staff (Satbayev University), facilitate international scientific projects (Syrdarya University, Zhetysu University), enhance incoming academic mobility by organizing summer and winter schools with invited researchers (S.Amanzholov East Kazakhstan State University).

Conclusion

The analysis of the external review reports and HEI cases showed that during pandemic universities reacted to the same problems at different paces. The following challenges of distance education in Kazakhstan have been identified:

- the need to develop and improve digital skills of academic staff for online teaching (trainings at Satbayev University, Almaty Management University);
- difficulty in implementation of online learning in some areas (for example, medicine, chemical technology, etc.);
- the challenges of organizing online exams, etc.

But 2020-2021 international experience confirms that HEIs around the world, as well as in Kazakhstan, are adapting and the digitalization of the educational process will be fostered.

Based on the thematic analysis, it can be stated that Kazakhstani HEIs have gained valuable lessons from the emergency situation "COVID-19 Pandemic", in particular, they have acquired and developed the experience of distance teaching:

1. The pandemic fostered the active use of third-party information management systems, as well as the development of HEIs educational platforms, and their subsequent integration.
2. Universities today offer flexible educational pathways: various learning modes (asynchronous, synchronous, mixed), digital service by libraries, new tools and learning channels
3. Due to the unplanned experiment with distance learning academic and professional staff and students have acquired new skills to work in a new mode
4. Digitalization of higher education encourages universities to develop and implement massive open online courses (MOOCs)
5. Universities need to develop educational infrastructure and resources.
6. The pandemic has opened up opportunities for expanding interuniversity and international partnership in the digital environment.

The performance of universities in remote mode has demonstrated the opportunities of digital technologies as well as their limitations. Firstly, the effective use of these technologies requires special competencies of teachers, university personnel, students, as well as effective technological solutions. Otherwise, it is impossible to talk about full-fledged education in a distance mode. Secondly, the situation has confirmed that some of the most important university processes are extremely difficult to digitalize.

Therefore, we can suggest that the future of higher education in Kazakhstan lies in the extensive use of digital technologies and distance mode in combination with the joint activities of teachers and students in the offline environment. The experience gained by universities and the development of the HEIs infrastructure will open up new horizons for developing international cooperation, implementing new teaching pathways, and enhancing the educational process. As a result, all abovementioned measures will be new steps towards enhancing the competitiveness of higher education in Kazakhstan.

References

1. External review reports of universities accredited in the Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education in 2019-2021 (Appendix 1)
2. Country report on the implementation of the parameters of the Bologna process in universities of the Republic of Kazakhstan – Nur-Sultan: RSE on PCV "Center of the Bologna process and academic mobility" MES RK, 2020. – 248 p.
3. [Online exams, distance learning and the use of proctoring — how a training session will be held in Kazakh universities, December 08, 2020](#), the official information resource of the Prime Minister (the Republic of Kazakhstan).

List of universities accredited by IQAA
in 2019-2021 and selected for thematic analysis

1. Almaty Management University
2. Caspian Public University
3. I. Zhansugurov Zhetysu State University
4. International Educational Corporation
5. Kazakh-American Free University
6. Kazakh-British Technical University
7. Kazakh University of Technology and Business
8. Kazakhstan Engineering Technological University
9. Satbayev University
10. S.Amanzholov East Kazakhstan State University
11. South Kazakhstan State Pedagogical University
12. Syrdarya University