

## Article

# Language-in-Education Policy of Kazakhstan: Post-Pandemic Technology Enhances Language Learning

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**Abstract:** In the current times of rapid technological progress, the development of quality education and encouragement of educated youth are extremely important. For this reason, a number of state projects and programs were developed in the education system of modern Kazakhstan. This paper is devoted to the problems of multilingual education and emergency remote learning in this country. The primary objectives were to examine the language competence and preferences of undergraduates and to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on remote language learning. Here, we present the survey and interview results of non-linguistic specialty students regarding their language preferences in various spheres, as well as the difficulties encountered during distance learning.

**Keywords:** multilingualism; language preferences; higher education; COVID-19; online technology tools



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## 1. Introduction

The modern Republic of Kazakhstan is a recognized democratic state of partly Eastern Europe and mostly Central Asia. The country celebrated its 30th anniversary of independence in 2021. In this short history of independence, Kazakhstan has been undertaking various reforms mainly in the economic, political and social spheres. Widely regarded as a significant issue of political action and attracting the attention of scientists, researchers and government officials, language policy has been an extremely interesting topic for countries with a complex linguistic environment.

Since 1991, the Kazakhstani government has willingly pursued higher-education reform. This has led to the enactment of a number of education-related laws and the adaptation of different policies and practices to facilitate the initial priority of transitioning to a market economy, and more recently, to achieve the goal of becoming one of the world's top 30 economies by 2050.

At the time of gaining independence, 61 higher-educational institutions were functioning in Kazakhstan. To date, this number has risen to 128 [1]. Since March 2010, Kazakhstan has become a member of the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe, thereby gaining full membership in the Bologna process. Sixty universities in Kazakhstan signed the Great Charter [2]. Another important indicator of the quality and attractiveness of the domestic higher-education system is its internationalization degree. The number of foreign students in 2020 amounted to 39,558 (10,361 in 2010, 12,837 in 2016, and 39,558 in 2020) [3]. The number of Kazakhstani universities listed in the international ranking of the best universities in the world QS has grown from 5 to 10 between 2011–2020 [4]. One university, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, entered the top 200 universities in the world according to the QS ranking [5].

To date, the Republic of Kazakhstan has realized the dramatic modernization of its education system by actively implementing a multilingualism policy, whose principles are reflected in the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, namely, laws “On languages in

the Republic of Kazakhstan” and “On education”, and “State program for the functioning and development of languages for 2020–2025” [6].

In accordance with UNESCO principles, the World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st century indicated the key point of integrating and developing multilingual education in higher-education institutions, that is, “the practice of multilingualism, teaching staff and students exchange program should be an integral part of all higher education systems” (Article 15) [7]. Multilingual learning programs provide the foundation of new education models, placing the language culture in the spotlight.

Additionally, the application of online learning has been on the rise, which became the new standard for higher-education institutions during the pandemic. The fundamental changes accompanying the COVID-19 situation has ushered societies into a digital era [8]. The ongoing paradigm of education has shifted in higher education and is proving to be an inescapable transition to a student-centered approach where learning outcomes play the central role and become the main objective of the educational process [9].

Digital transformation is not a novel phenomenon, as it has been accompanying higher-education institutions for some years now [10]. In these establishments, it is a topical issue that several stakeholders of education must feel concerned about; given that the ability to apply ICT in every sphere of life is incremental, universities must live up to the task of preparing potential professionals to be able to face the relevant challenges and provide solutions [11]. Moreover, this process has called on the integration of sustainable management to successfully adjust to the modifications enforced as a result of novel technologies [12] and the recent pandemic.

The present study, which involved four higher-education institutions in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, aimed to determine the degree of influence of the pandemic on the development and formation of language competencies, as well as to identify the language preferences of undergraduates on the whole. The findings hopefully provide us with an insight into the current state of multilingual-language-policy implementation in these particular HEIs, and offer further valuable information on the formulation of sustainable multilingual policies for higher education in Kazakhstan.

## 2. Language Policy in Independent Kazakhstan

In the modern Republic of Kazakhstan, over 130 different ethnic groups and nationalities coexist and work together, with two dominating groups: Kazakhs and Russians. According to the latest national census (2021), Kazakhstan is ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse: Kazakhs, the largest group, account for 69.1% of the total population; other ethnicities include Russians (18.42%); Uzbeks (2.8%); Ukrainians (2.1%); Uighurs (1.4%), Tatars (1.3%); Germans (1.1%) [13]. In addition, there are smaller ethnic groups, like Koreans, Kurds, Turks and Chechens, who have been forcibly displaced during mass deportations to the country during the Soviet era [14]. With such a cultural landscape, the formation and implementation of language policy is a political challenge for the government and the political elite.

As proof of the great results achieved in this respect, Kazakhstan had no language policy or strategy in the first few years of independence; the state currently guarantees not only the right to use languages freely, but also the protection and the development of all languages, nationalities and ethnic groups in the country.

The concept of language policy in Kazakhstan defines the main difficulty of “creating an optimal language space of the state” [15], as one that requires “a clear definition of the functional correlation of languages, in which the state language should take its rightful place”.

The current language policy in Kazakhstan reflects the sociodemographic and linguistic complexity of the Republic. On the one hand, the government pursues the monolingual policy of kazakhization aimed at establishing Kazakh as the state language of independent Kazakhstan. On the other hand, Kazakhstan has been a historically multinational state with a large percentage of the population speaking Russian as a native or second language [16]. This prompted the government to introduce a multilingual policy to maintain Russian

and other languages. In addition, the rapid penetration of English into Kazakhstani society, coupled with the government's ambitions of making Kazakhstan a competitive player in the regional and world economy, has also facilitated the adoption of a multilingual ideology.

Russian is *de jure* and *de facto* an official language in Kazakhstan. Its status was elevated from a language of interethnic communication (1989 Law on Languages of the Kazakh SSR, 1993 Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan) to an official language in the 1995 Constitution [17]. Therefore, all legislative documents, official announcements, and forms have to be issued in two languages.

Another primary target of the language policy in Kazakhstan is the comprehensive development of the English language and the expansion of its areas of application. This is illustrated by the Trinity of Languages project launched in 2007, in which the English language was given a special status as a language of integration into the world economy [18]. In the "State Program for the Functioning and Development of Languages for 2021–2025", one of the target indicators is the increase in the proportion of the population who speaks English (24% by 2021, 25% by 2022, 30% by 2025); another is the share of the population speaking three languages (state, Russian and English) (26% in 2020, 27% in 2021, 28% in 2022, 29% in 2023, 30% in 2024, 31% in 2025) [19].

### 3. Language-Education Policy in Higher-Education Institutions

Language-education policy (LEP) is "a species of language policy" [20] that is "concerned with the organization of language teaching within the formal educational system" [21]; one that dictates what languages are to be taught as subjects and what languages are to be used as a medium of instruction. "LEP is considered as a form of imposition and manipulation of language as it is used by those in authority to turn ideology into practice through formal education" [22].

Choosing the medium of instruction is a critical decision that touches on all the main issues of language-education policy and acquisition planning. According to Kaplan and Baldauf [23], these issues comprise the targeted students, the teachers and their training, the syllabus and curriculum, the methods and materials, the economic resources, and last but not least, assessment and evaluation.

The aims relating to student achievement form a decisive factor in the development of a language-education policy, the outcomes of which can be determined through language competence, whether monolingualism, bilingualism, or competence in several languages [24].

There is a flexible use of languages as media of instruction in the classroom, which is in line with local multilingual practices [25]. The curricular content draws not only on academic scholarships but also on students' lived experiences and identities. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the teacher's classroom practices create a space of awareness and acceptance of, as well as access to, a wide communicative and academic repertoire for the students.

Multilingual education at its best should be (1) multilingual in that it uses and values more than one language in teaching and learning; (2) intercultural in that it recognizes and values understanding and dialogue between different life events and cultural worldviews; and (3) one that progresses by taking the knowledge that students bring to the classroom as its starting point and aiming towards their position as full and irreplaceable participants in society in local, national and global environments [26].

In the edition of Bernard Spolsky, *Language and education in multilingual settings* [27], the author considers multilingualism as far more complicated, prevalent and meaningful than previously thought. Among the subjects covered in his work are language and ethnic movements, mother tongue and national languages, the political and economic consequences of "colonial" languages, and the effects of different language policies on students' cognitive development. In addition, Spolsky is convinced that the bilingual or multilingual issue is not limited to a linguistic problem; it is the result of social, political,

religious, and most importantly, economic concerns of people whose first language is not the dominant language of the society.

In light of the above, modern life in Kazakhstan demands new strategies for challenges to be faced in the process of multilingual education delivery to the population [28].

## 4. Methods

### 4.1. Research Context

This study attempted to assess the impact of the pandemic situation and determine the language use, language competencies, and preferences of students in this milieu.

To fulfill the above tasks, we decided to use mixed methods and combine quantitative and qualitative research elements.

According to Poth and Munce [29], a mixed-methods design can integrate and synergize multiple data sources and thus can assist with studying complex problems. This approach means purposeful data consolidation, which enables researchers to put their study in a wide perspective by allowing them to view a phenomenon from different angles and research lenses [30].

In other words, mixing two methods helps to assemble a more complete picture and provides an opportunity to apply a greater assortment of divergent or complementary views [31]. These are valuable as they not only lead to extra reflection and improve our understanding of a phenomenon, but also create new avenues for future inquiries.

To generate valid results, we conducted both online questionnaires and online interviews. The former allowed us to connect with a large number of students in a short period of time. To this end, a questionnaire was distributed among students through university channels in Telegram Messenger, to student groups in WhatsApp Messenger, and to the email addresses of participants. With reference to online interviewing, it was not necessary to arrange a venue as each individual could take part at their own convenience, and the facilitation of the online interview only required internet access.

This study aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. What is the current language situation among undergraduates?
2. What major challenges have students faced during emergency remote-learning procedures?

### 4.2. Participants

A total of 327 respondents took part in the questionnaire, among which 194 people (59%) were females and 133 people (41%) were males aged 17 to 26. Among the respondents, 11 students took part in Zoom interviews. The participants represented the four top universities in Nur-Sultan: Nazarbayev University, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakh Agrotechnical University, and Kazakh Humanitarian Law University.

The students were asked questions on technology and language aspects of studying from home similar to those in the questionnaire. The interviews averaged 9 min, excluding informed consent and introductions. All responses were audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

Participants were designated by the letter R and a number. Literal quotations from the transcripts were typed in italics, and they conveyed the features of the speech of the participants; however, in this publication, pauses, breaks, reservations, and pause fillers were not taken into account, nor were they recorded in the written reproduction of oral speech.

### 4.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data-collection period lasted from September 2021 to February 2022. From the beginning of this period, students of the chosen HEIs were studying in a mixed learning format. Specifically, lectures were held online, and practical and laboratory classes were held in a traditional setting in physical classrooms.

The questionnaire consisted of 32 questions and 3 sections. In Section 1, the questions were aimed at identifying language proficiency levels; in Section 2, we compiled questions to ascertain the language preferences of students in various fields, and finally, in the third

section, we asked participants about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning languages remotely and the various online technology tools used in foreign-language classes.

Having scheduled the interview, we sent an invitation from the Zoom platform to interviewees, to which 11 respondents gave a positive response. At the start of the interview, we introduced the participants to the interviewer's code. We warned that the survey should be conducted under conditions of psychological comfort for the respondent, and that the interview would be recorded only after the respondent had been informed about the purpose and methods of the conversation and agreed to the further use of the interview materials in the implementation of this study.

Furthermore, the students named the main challenges, advantages and disadvantages, as well as the changes they would like to make to the distance-learning format of a foreign language.

#### 4.4. Ethical Considerations

Turning to the ethical issues, the paper includes the survey of people, and the collection and storing of their interview data. In order to guarantee the protection of their fundamental rights, in particular their right to privacy, research was conducted in accordance with countries' legislation and with the regulations set up in the data protection directive (95/46/EC) of the EU and in the "Convention for the Protection of Individuals with Regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data" (CETS No.: 108) of the Council of Europe. In this paper, researchers conduct and report research in accordance with the standards set for academic work and transfer of knowledge, apply ethical methods for the collection, research and evaluation of personal data, including obtaining informed consent, and give credit to other researchers' work.

While conducting qualitative interviews, the seven principles for ethical research were fully applied: social value, scientific validity, fair subject selection, favourable risk-benefit ratio, independent review, informed consent, and respect for enrolled subjects. As [32] suggests, there is no single "trustworthy ethical formula" that could be applied to a qualitative research interview (see [33]); ethical guidelines were co-constructed as the each interview progressed.

## 5. Results and Discussion

Our first research question aimed to assess the current language situation among undergraduates and to determine the choice of language in a number of communicatively significant situations.

The results of the conducted sociolinguistic research are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The students' language proficiency level.

Level	Kazakh	Russian	English
speaks fluently	64.6%	96.3%	39.7%
has problems in speaking	33.3%	3.7%	48.4%
does not speak	2.1%	-	11.9%

The data presented in Table 1 show the obvious dominance of the Russian language among the study population. Meanwhile, it is worth noting the fairly confident communicative positions of both the Kazakh and English languages, which proves the effectiveness of the policy expanding the spheres of the state language use, as well as that which promotes English within the trinity of languages. The importance of the English language in the life of modern Kazakhstani society is also evidenced by the respondents' answers to the question related to the role of the English language in further professional growth—"How important is knowledge of English to you for further professional growth?"—to which respondents answered as follows: "very important", 62.7%; "important", 26.4%; "not very important", 6.4%; "not important", 4.5%. Thus, the majority of respondents associated the further advancement of their professional activities with knowledge of the English

language. In addition, based on the data obtained during the survey, it can be argued that English proficiency is one of the main factors associated with the possibility of career growth for Kazakhstanis.

A glance at Table 2 reveals the equal use of Kazakh and Russian languages at home. Meanwhile, outside the home the use of Kazakh, Russian and English is also becoming popular. In the other listed areas, we see the predominance of the Russian language.

**Table 2.** The use of Kazakh, Russian and English languages in various situations.

Question	Kaz	Rus	Eng	Kaz Rus, Eng	Kaz, Rus	Kaz, Eng	Rus, Eng
What language(s) do you speak at home?	14.2	19.1	-	2.3	63.1	-	1.3
What language(s) do you speak outside your home?	11.1	28.4	1.2	36.4	22.9	-	-
In what language(s) do you browse the Internet?	1.8	58.4	1.4	27.6	7.3	1.3	2.2
In what language(s) do you read scientific articles?	5.6	33.5	1.9	18.6	23.1	0.9	16.4
In what language(s) do you read for pleasure?	12.1	41.5	2.1	11.4	18.2	4.9	9.8
What language(s) do you use for social media?	1.2	32.3	3.2	22.1	28.3	5.1	7.8
In what language(s) do you process ideas (thoughts)?	12.2	39.3	1.8	10.1	27.8	1.8	7.1
What language is installed on your mobile phone?	-	83.7	16.3	-	-	-	-

This sociolinguistic survey helped to determine the language competence and the prevalence of trilingualism among undergraduates in Nur-Sultan. The findings indicated the uniform use of Kazakh and Russian languages in the social and communicative space in Kazakhstan. In addition, there is a growing interest in English [34], which is expected since this language is the medium of international communication in the field of business, science and technology.

### 5.1. Shift to Online Learning

The second research question aimed to identify the challenges students faced during emergency remote-learning protocols and the various technology tools used in foreign-language classes.

Online learning is a global trend in education, consistently implemented by major universities such as Stanford, Berkley, MIT, etc. [35]. For Kazakhstani universities, the situation with total quarantine has become both a serious test of strength and a good opportunity to show their state of progress in this field [36].

The COVID-19 pandemic led to the necessity to adopt new teaching methodologies due to the impossibility of having face-to-face lessons [37]. Therefore, online teaching and learning has played an important role in higher education lately. After questioning students from four universities about teaching and learning, we found out that 45% of them recognized online learning as more interesting than traditional learning, and 52% claimed that distance learning was more convenient.

Furthermore, 58% of students noted technical difficulties such as issues with the Internet, 14% of students had difficulty concentrating during online classes, 26% of students had difficulty with the impossibility of live contact, and only 2% had problems with understanding the material.

There was no single distance-learning scheme among the surveyed higher-education institutions. The investigation showed that classes in universities were mainly held on

educational platforms such as *Platonus* and *Moodle*, *Zoom*, *Microsoft Teams*, *MOOC*, *WebEx*, and *Google Classroom*.

## 5.2. Interview Results

Regarding remote language learning, respondent R1 said that user authentication during knowledge testing was the biggest disadvantage. *“When there were tests in English, my classmates who do not speak English very well passed the exams with excellent marks. I think they asked someone to do it for them. The same concerns our independent work; we all turned to the Internet and handed in our assignments. In addition, I believe that in the traditional format this would not have happened and we would have mastered the language much better”*.

Establishing the identity of a student is not an easy task when conducting remote examinations [38]. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the following technologies can be used to solve such difficulties:

A good technique to solve this problem is to use an online proctoring system. It is a monitoring system that automatically detects any prohibited actions before and during the exam. Surveillance is conducted from three sources: audio, video stream and desktop screen recording [39]. When one tries to open another tab in the browser (except for the window with the exam) or peeps/listens to the hint, the system automatically marks the violation and sends the information to the examiner.

If the educational institution does not have the technology to identify an individual, then identification is carried out via Skype by providing a student card, passport, and any other document containing a photograph of the student [40].

Respondent R2 considered distance learning the most effective approach to learn languages. This participant highlighted the abundance of visual aids and emphasized that it was much more convenient to broadcast a video, presentation, audio recording, etc. The respondent was convinced that the use of multimedia visual aids enhanced and facilitated the comprehension of grammar and language, increased student motivation, and helped memorize new vocabulary and grammatical structures.

Images are the simplest and the most effective means of making sure that the information gets stored as long-term memory. According to Dr. Lynell Burmark, an education consultant, our short-term memory processes words and can only retain about seven bits of information [41]. Meanwhile, images are directly processed by our long-term memory, where they become indelibly etched [42].

Respondent R3 admitted that it was much more difficult to express thoughts in the online class system. *“I don’t know why exactly, but it’s hard for me to formulate an idea in English in online classes. Perhaps this is because you have to speak on camera. Or the fact that there is no live contact in such classes. After all, we learn language through communication. In addition, communication, in my opinion, is best implemented in the traditional format of learning”*.

Currently, online classrooms are supposed to replicate the experience of physical classrooms, with some added benefits of file sharing, instant feedback, and interaction [43]. Notwithstanding the benefits, there are inconveniences for students in online classrooms. For example, they cannot talk to each other, interact in the classroom openly, and they miss out on classroom-related extracurricular activities such as class parties, face-to-face presentations, classroom games, etc.

Respondent R4 asserted that online classes are much more tiring. *“I noticed that in the classroom, while everyone is trying to say something in a language other than their own, the rest are often bored. However, this was not observed in the classroom before the pandemic”*. Apparently, this student was referring to the state of burnout in online classes; in a video call, minds are together, but bodies are not; this cognitive dissonance causes conflictual feelings that are exhausting [44]. This is because users are virtually connected, but they do not physically share the same space. This condition has been commonly referred to as Zoom fatigue.

The 5th respondent noted that teachers were more accessible in the traditional learning format. *“You can ask questions right away. I remember that, even at the beginning of online learning, we tried to ask questions, and there was always chaos in the classes, and as a result, the teacher*

could not propose the question. Then, having passed the adaptation of training on online platforms, we began to ask questions by raising our hand and waiting for our turn. It happened that by the time our turn came, the question had already lost its relevance. Yes, it is comfortable to study in a home environment, but if we talk about the quality, about the effectiveness of language learning, we achieve better results in offline classes”.

Some online teachers use the option of chat to encourage their students to comment and interact [45]. This is a great way to increase interaction because the level of commitment is low, as opposed to participating in a video or audio conversation.

Constructive feedback is also valued by students who study online [46], especially when it is given immediately [47]. Creating a constant open dialogue for feedback and fast response times can lead to improved student satisfaction.

The next respondent considered that it was right to introduce mixed education in universities. In their opinion, theory classes could be held online, and practical classes should be kept within the walls of the university. *“As for the English language? This is also more practical. At our university, English lessons have always been very lively. We performed various creative tasks, mini projects... However, during the pandemic, the lessons became less interesting, which even reduced student attendance”.*

Practical and laboratory classes are designed to deepen, expand, and reinforce the knowledge gained at the lecture in an interactive form and contribute to the development of professional skills [48]. Through laboratory experience during physical classes, students can develop a deeper understanding of concepts and connect textbook knowledge to real-world applications.

From the point of view of respondent R7, there was no tangible difference between the traditional and distance-learning formats. *“It all depends on the student himself. If a student has motivation, he can be successful in any format. However, I want to highlight the advantage of online learning specifically for our university. During distance learning, the university organized a speaking club with a native speaker from Pennsylvania. Joshua held Zoom meetings every week. In addition, I believe that, thanks to him, I improved my pronunciation at least a little”.*

There is still an ongoing debate regarding online and physical classrooms [49]. However, people have various preferences with regards to selecting the most suitable mode of education.

In terms of practicing a second language with native speakers, students can learn a living language, the one that is spoken in the native speakers’ country at the time, with all its modern words, interesting phrases, abbreviations and simplified grammar rules [50]. Outdated expressions, formal words or intricate grammatical constructions are normally absent.

Undoubtedly, to appropriately switch to online learning, three requirements need to be fulfilled: access to the Internet, appropriate technology, and the skills to use this technology [51]. We asked students about these criteria of online learning, and the answers are discussed below.

When asked about new technologies used in foreign-language classes in the context of distance learning, the most often mentioned platforms for organizing video meetings and lectures were Platonus and Moodle, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, MOOC, WebEx, and Google Classroom.

For respondent R8, the web service Flippity.net was the most attractive one. *“We used this service both in class and at home. For teachers, it allowed the creation of quizzes, presentations, memory games, and more. It was important for me that, at home, in the process of memorizing words, I could learn the spelling, pronunciation and translation of words. It turned out that on the given site, having prepared interactive cards, we got pronunciation tasks and exercises for practicing words using a single link”.*

Flippity is an online service that allows the creation of a variety of interactive learning activities based on Google Spreadsheets [52]. In terms of functionality, Flippity is similar to popular services such as LearningApps, Quizziz, and Classtools.

Respondent R9 mostly liked the Sensations English language-learning resource. *“It is an innovative and engaging way to learn English. Using videos and articles based on recent news reports, you will improve your English while learning about real-world events. Video is one of*



*the most effective tools to learn. Sensations English keeps us stay up-to-date with fresh news and continuous learning”.*

Sensations English is a unique English language-learning website that delivers lessons featuring topical news videos and written news articles. Based in England, Sensations English is aimed at students of all levels all around the world. Each lesson has a range of educational learning games and study tools created by experienced EFL teachers.

Another participant, R10, stated that online English lessons did not differ much from the traditional format. *“We mainly read texts, go through some kind of grammar... By the way, we played the game Pictionary several times on the Zoom platform. It is a game of charades where players draw words instead of acting them out. We were usually divided into two groups; then, someone from one team drew on the whiteboard of the platform, and the second team had about a minute to guess a word. It was very funny and useful. In my opinion, such games are great ways to practice vocabulary”.*

Zoom is a highly versatile platform for video conferencing. In addition to other features, it lets users annotate on a whiteboard as well as on the shared screens. Zoom’s whiteboard feature provides students with a simple white canvas on which they can write or draw with their mouse.

Respondent R11 also shared their experience of some valuable resources used in English classes at their university. *“Our teacher loves the Kahoot platform very much. Usually, at the very beginning and at the end of the lesson, Kahoot is used to reinforce the topic. The teacher also sends links to our chat to learn words using the Quizlet app. It is highly convenient to learn new words there. There is also an ELSA program where you can train your pronunciation. The teacher herself registered us there and helped us figure out how to use it”.*

The Kahoot platform helps to assess students’ knowledge in a funny way. This program is designed to create quizzes, didactic games, tests, and surveys [53]. Today, this service is widely used in all educational institutions across Nur-Sultan.

Quizlet is a free online service that enables students to learn new vocabulary using special tools and educational games presented on their platform. The user has the opportunity to create and use so-called flash cards in teaching. A flash card is a term/word with a definition/translation, voice acting and illustration, which are the basic components of the training module. The learning module consists of sets of cards on different topics.

ELSA, or English Language Speech Assistant, is an engaging and amusing app specially created to help students enhance their English pronunciation. It performs a true full analysis of speakers’ pronunciation with error examination and explains how to pronounce the different sounds correctly.

## 6. Conclusions

The present study, involving students from four higher-education institutions in Nur-Sultan, analyzed the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the development and formation of language competencies, and elicited the language preferences of undergraduates.

Questionnaires and interviews with students from the given universities on teaching and learning revealed that 45% of them recognized online learning as more interesting than traditional learning. Meanwhile, according to 52% of respondents, distance learning was more convenient. Only 14% of students had concentration difficulty in the online class system, and 2% had problems with understanding the study material.

The data obtained from the questionnaire uncovered the uniform use of the Kazakh and Russian languages in the social and communicative space in the country. Moreover, we revealed a growing interest in the English language, which is unsurprising, as it is the current language of international communication in the field of business, science and technology.

To understand the issues related to the policy of trilingualism, the promotion of the English language, and the problem of language preferences among students in Kazakhstan, we consistently solved the tasks set forth in the context of the postpandemic situation, such as:

- the preferences of respondents in selecting a language in various situations were described.
- the opinions of respondents regarding remote language learning were studied.

- the benefits, drawbacks and challenges of online learning during the pandemic were named.
- the various online technology tools used in foreign-language classes were mentioned.

From the analysis carried out by questioning students from Kazakhstani higher-educational institutions, considering the studied aspect of the implementation of multilingualism, it follows that many universities in modern Kazakhstan have approved the concept of multilingualism development in their institutions.

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