

Dear NUGSERIE community,

This issue is being published in truly unusual times that we, along with the entire world, are forced to experience. The Covid-19 outbreak and the measures taken to tackle this global pandemic have placed humankind in the position of quarantine and self-isolation, peeling away the unnecessary and leaving us with the brutal realization of what truly matters. Naïve and childish as they may seem, the thoughts that come to my mind are nothing but positive and, as much as we need to be realistic, being an educator, I see how a “hopeless” and mildly motivated student can become a fighter and high achiever, given enough support, instructions, and time to reflect. I also believe that optimism is the best way to go.

One definite benefit of quarantine and the switch to forced online learning in mainstream schools has been the revelation of certain problems and pitfalls, which are usually not as obvious or tend to be underestimated. Written before the so-called ‘new norm’ of home offices, compulsory online classes, and social distancing, the articles presented in NUGSERIE Volume 5 Issue 1 are now perhaps more relevant than ever before.

The first article, authored by Guldana Tazhimbet, tackles the topic of teacher and school leadership in mainstream schools, as seen in Kazakhstan as opposed to Western countries, and illustrates the obstacles that teachers, school administration, and even parents have to face due to the long-term and far-reaching results of the top-down approach employed by the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES). After unpacking this important matter, Tazhimbet concludes the article with recommendations on how the overall communication between all stakeholders could be maintained and how much autonomy teachers and school administrators might be granted.

The second article, written by Arina Hooper-Prilipko, juxtaposes explicit instruction in language teaching with implicit approaches. This analytical paper is of special interest to language teachers and curriculum developers, as the author suggests how the age of students and type of language skills taught determine whether explicit or implicit instructions are more efficient. In this paper, the author concludes with a rationale as to why educators must be given the freedom to choose between these two types of instruction in accordance with the age of the target student audience.

Finally, our third author, Aida Amirova, presents an analytical paper on quality assurance frameworks in higher education, its aims, and its methods of implementation around the world, following the review of this work conducted in Kazakhstan throughout the last decade. It unveils that the ultimate and, sadly, often underestimated stakeholders, students, play a vital role in enhancing the quality assurance framework in Kazakhstani higher education institutions.

The Covid-19 outbreak, school closures, and transition to online learning have become a litmus test, highlighting many of the issues that education systems have been experiencing for years. Therefore, the implications described in the three articles align with the recommendations stated by OECD consultant, Aliya Bizhanova, who analyzed the problems that the Kazakhstani educational system has faced during quarantine and online learning in 2020 (2020, April 13). The measures taken, although seeming efficient on paper, failed to comply with the aims in reality: not all students were equipped with computers or other technology, and internet connections have not always been stable. After 10-minute nation-wide lessons on national television were used instead of local online lessons, teachers struggled to follow MoES instructions rather than figuring out their own personal strategies and approaches to make lessons happen. The range of hidden consequences being detected every day brings us closer to the unsettling realization of the far-reaching and long-term consequences of this year’s quarantine for many educational systems (Doyle, 2020), Kazakhstani included. This, however, also provides motivation and certain directions for many educators to act and collaborate on solving these issues, especially given the fact that the recent large-scale international comparative studies conducted over the past several years can be considered as data to base the modifications on and compare the results to.

The first editorial, written by Rizagul Syzdykbayeva, a specialist at the Information Analytical Center (IAC) and NUGSE MA in Multilingual Education alumna, reviews three crucial studies, the results of which were published at the end of 2019: The Teaching and Learning International Survey 2018 (TALIS), International Computer and Information Literacy Study 2018 (ICILS), and The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment 2018 (PISA). These will be informative for educators, students, and parents to see the overall data on the most important aspects of education, knowledge, and skills evaluation of various countries, as well as data on the Kazakhstani situation. Personally, I am convinced that you will want to access the IAC website to learn about these research studies in details and send the links to reports in English, Kazakh, or Russian to your colleagues.

In the second editorial, NUGSE PhD candidate Akmaral Karabay has combined the experiences of the second-year PhD students of NUGSE who studied for one semester in partner universities, either the University of Pennsylvania, USA, or Cambridge University, UK. This editorial is a definite must-read for prospective PhD applicants, and will be a source of inspiration as you read into the unique insights of students who experienced studying at prestigious Ivy League universities.

Dear readers, as you have probably noticed, this NUGSERIE issue continues the tradition of presenting you with highly relevant, informative and masterfully written articles and editorials to satisfy your thirst for knowledge and desire to keep in touch with a community of scholars interested in educational research in Kazakhstan. Therefore, without further ado, we present NUGSERIE Volume 5 Issue 1 and thank you for continued interest in this meaningful project.

Kamila Kozhabayeva

Chief Editor

References

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