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## **CONTENT ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' INTERNET COMMUNICATION WITH AUTHORITIES AND UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIONS TO STUDY PROBLEMS OF KAZAKHSTAN YOUTH**

Sociological surveys usually conducted to reveal the problematic issues that concern students sometimes are not suffice to show the most acute problems and concerns. Therefore, the authors of the article undertook to employ additional tools to collect the data on the issues faced by students today and on the means they trying to resolve them, namely the existing channels of communication with administrative figures of their universities and with the authorities. The article deals with most effective resources available for students at present such as the blogs of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the blogs of Chancellors of a number of Kazakhstan universities. The authors argue that the blogs and websites are not only good alternative source for a research conducted in the aim to reveal the current sentiments and attitudes among students, they also will facilitate timely identification of the difficulties and problems faced by students today. The article discusses the reasons why students decide to post on the blogs of the Minister of Education and Science and those of the Chancellors of their universities. The quantitative analysis of the posts made by students on the blogs of the Minister of Education and Science and those of the universities Chancellors enabled to find out that only 0.001% of students throughout Kazakhstan are ready to raise openly their problems via electronic modes of communication. Among possible causes, the authors identify low level of students' confidence in such communication modes and poor quality of the feedback received. The article depicts how the problems raised by students are reflected in the activities of the state. The content analysis of the Addresses of the President N. Nazarbayev to the Nation of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the blogs, and the inquiries made by the Members of the Parliament show that the main problems are overall improvement of the quality of education so that it would provide for training of professionals who are qualified enough to contribute into for the country's economy, employment of the graduates, and the housing.

**Key words:** student youth, ministry of education and science, deputies, blogs, problem students.

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**Қазақстан жастарының мәселелерін зерттеу мақсатында  
студенттердің билік және университет әкімшілігімен  
интернет коммуникациясын контент талдау**

Әдетте, студенттік жастар мәселелерін анықтау үшін жүргізілетін әлеуметтік сұраулар өзекті сұрақтарды әркез жедел анықтай бермейді. Сондықтан, бұл мақалада студенттерді мазалайтын негізгі мәселелер, олардың билік өкілдері мен ЖОО әкімшілігімен өздерінің маңызды проблемаларын шешуге тырысатын негізгі коммуникациялық арналары туралы ақпараттарды алудың қосымша тәсілдері зерттеледі. Негізгі арналар ретінде қазіргі таңдағы әрекеттілігі көп

ақпараттық көздер қарастырылды: Қазақстан Республикасының Білім және ғылым министрі және қазақстандық ЖОО ректорларының блогтары. Блогтар мен сайттар тек студенттердің көңіл-күйлерін зерттеудің көзі ғана емес, сонымен қатар, студенттік ортадағы қайшылықтар мен проблемаларды уақытылы анықтауға мүмкіндік береді. Мақалада студенттердің білім және ғылым министрлігінің, ЖОО жетекшілерінің блогына жазу себептері зерттеледі. Білім және ғылым министрлігі және жоғары оқу орындары ректорларының блогтарына студенттердің жазуларының негізінде қазақстандық ЖОО тек 0,001% студенттері ғана өз мәселелерін ашық көтере алады деген қорытынды шығарылды. Бұл студенттердің бұндай он-лайн коммуникацияларға сенімінің төмендігімен, кері байланыс арналарының тиімділігінің төмен деңгейімен байланысты. Мақалада студенттердің көтеріп отырған мәселелері мемлекеттің қызметінде қалай көрініс табатындығы көрсетілген. Қазақстан Республикасы Президенті Н.Ә. Назарбаевтың жолдауларының, депутаттар блогы, сұрауының контент талдамасы негізінде ел экономикасы үшін маман және білікті кадрлар дайындау, түлектердің жұмыспен қамтылуы, тұрғын үй мәселелері негізгі проблемалар екендігі анықталды.

**Түйін сөздер:** студенттік жастар, Білім және ғылым министрлігі, депутаттар, блогтар, студенттер мәселелері.

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### **Контент-анализ интернет-коммуникации студентов с властью и администрацией университетов с целью изучения проблем молодежи Казахстана**

Социологические опросы, которые обычно проводятся для выявления проблем студенческой молодежи, не всегда оперативно выявляют актуальные вопросы. Поэтому в этой статье изучены дополнительные способы получения информации о важных проблемах, беспокоящих студентов, их основные коммуникационные каналы с представителями власти и администрацией вузов, посредством которых они пытаются их решить. В качестве основных каналов были рассмотрены наиболее действенные в настоящее время информационные ресурсы: блоги министра образования и науки Республики Казахстан и ректоров казахстанских вузов. Блоги и сайты могут явиться не только альтернативным источником исследования настроения студентов, но и позволят своевременно обнаружить назревшие противоречия и проблемы в студенческой среде. В статье исследуются причины обращения студентов на блоги министерства образования и науки, руководителей вузов. На основе обращений студентов в блоги министерства образования и науки, ректоров высших учебных заведений сделан вывод, что всего лишь 0,001% студентов казахстанских вузов открыто поднимают свои проблемы. Это связано с низким доверием студентов к таким он-лайн коммуникациям, низкой степенью эффективности каналов обратной связи. В статье показано как отражаются проблемы, поднимаемые студентами в деятельности государства. На основе контент анализа Посланий Президента Республики Казахстан Н. Назарбаева, блогов, запросов депутатов определены, что основными проблемами студенчества являются подготовка специалистов и квалифицированных кадров для экономики страны, трудоустройство выпускников, жилищные вопросы.

**Ключевые слова:** студенческая молодежь, министерство образования и науки, депутаты, блоги, проблемы студентов.

## **Introduction**

Increasing significance of the youth in general and the student youth in particular for the character of political processes and for the entire political wellbeing of a nation is increasingly apparent throughout the world. The problematics of youth political engagement has been interested the researchers both in the established Western democracies (Pickard, 2018; Grasso, 2016; Fahmy, 2017) and in

those in the process of being consolidated (Rodgers & Young, 2017; Wong et al, 2011).

Political actors have been consistently seeking to gain the support of the young as their participation often predetermines the outcomes of political struggle. The end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries demonstrated that the role of the young was the most visible during the political uprising (Roberts, 2015). The youth was crucial political force in the Arab Spring (Gaub, 2012; Lynch,

2014) – although their impact has been assessed differently (Rennick, 2018) – and of the “color revolutions” (Поляников & Прокопов, 2005). In Kazakhstan, the young were the major participants in the events of the December 1986 (Правда, 1986).

The attitude of the youth in Kazakhstan has been in the research interest. There have been sociological surveys on the problems of youth in Kazakhstan. Among those worth mentioning in the context of the article are that conducted by «Strategia» Center for Social and Political Research (2014), by the «Public Opinion» Research Institute jointly with the F. Ebert Foundation (Умбеталиева et al, 2016), the «Youth» Research Center (2015), the Alliance of Analytical Studies (2014), as well as by the Institute of Philosophy, Political and Religious Studies (Шаукенова, 2014). However, none of these studies, except that made by Biekenova (2017), give a comprehensive picture about the most acute problems affecting and concerning the student youth. The authors of this article undertake to do exactly that using the method that has not been employed so far for such a purpose.

## Methods

The study, which provided the basis for the article, was designed and conducted in the framework of implementation of the Project sponsored by the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan “Educational Migration from Kazakhstan: Trends, Factors, Societal and Political Implications”.

The analysis provided in the article is based on three bodies of data collected and processed by the authors: the data, namely the Internet sources, that reveals the frequency and content of the inquiries made by the “authority figures” on the youth issues – in this case these are the deputies of the Majilis of the Parliament of Kazakhstan – and the frequency and content of the inquiries made by the students to the “authorities” – here these figures are the Minister of Education and the chancellors of their respected universities. The article also includes the findings received during the focus-group discussions.

This study that provides the basis for the article was a quantitative analysis and a qualitative content analysis of inquiries sent by students to the blogs of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan over the past 5 years and to university chancellors into their virtual reception rooms over the past 10 years. The study of the students' inquiries enabled to reveal the nature of their concerns that allows to determine the most pressing topical issues that prompted them to post

their inquiries on the blogs to reach the Education Minister and the chancellors of their universities respectively.

Apart from the blog of the Minister of Science and Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Majilis website, the content analysis covered 22 of 42 universities in Kazakhstan having “national” and “state” status because those universities have websites and the “Rector’s Blog” thereon.

The premise the authors based their analysis on was that overall wellbeing and social satisfaction of students is dependent on how well their concerns were addressed. Therefore, it was important to learn how strongly the authority figures are interested in learning about and addressing the topical issues concerning the student youth. The content analysis of the Parliament deputies' requests covered the period of the last 5 years from 2012 until 2017.

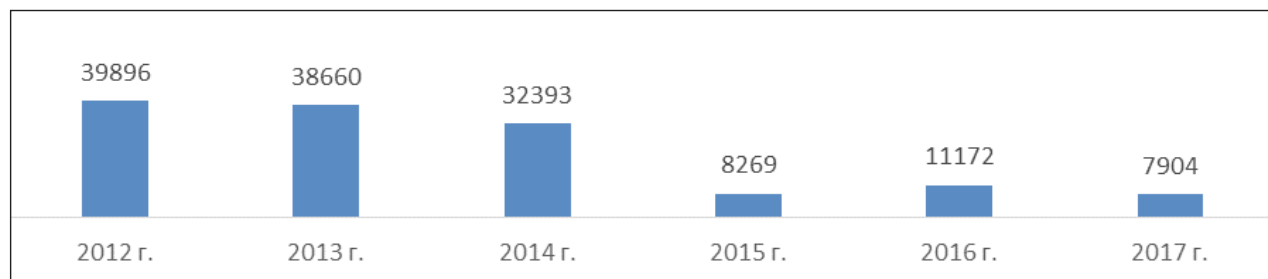
The article also uses the findings of the focus group discussion conducted within the “Political Culture of Student Youth of Kazakhstan” Project implemented at the Department of Political Science and Political Technology of al-Farabi KazNU (Nassimova, 2017). The method is a special form of in-depth interview conducted in a group (otherwise known as in-depth group interview). Three focus group discussions were held; the first comprised the students from the same university, the second one included the students of technical and vocational colleges, the third included the students from a number of universities of Kazakhstan. The focus-group participants were ranged according to their lingual and sex-age characteristics. The number of participants per group was 8-10 respondents. In the result, conducting a series of the above mentioned FGD enabled us to collect information that was relevant in order to find the answers to the following questions covered in this article:

1. Whom do the students address when the problems and difficulties accrue?
2. How often do the students address the state bodies, i.e. the Ministers, or universities' administration to resolve their problematic issues? Which problematic issues may prompt the students to appeal to the state bodies and university administration?
3. What are the issues concerning students' youth raised by President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan and by the deputies of the Majilis of the Parliament of Kazakhstan?
4. What are the students' issues that the government is likely to resolve? What are the mechanism for doing so?

## Results and Discussion

*Blog of Education and Science Minister; Students' Inquiries and Communications:* the practice of online communication was introduced back in 2009 under the directive of the Prime Minister K. Massimov instructing all heads of the central executive bodies to open and maintain their personal blogs. Thus, an additional channel of communication of the state bodies with the population was introduced. According to M

Shibutov (2017), this, to a certain extent, devalued more traditional channels of communication such as through the media, political parties and the representative bodies (Shibutov, cited in Regnum.ru, 2017). However, the initial enthusiasm gradually faded. According to D. Satpayev (2015), Kazakhstan's top officials are rather slow in terms of their responses, therefore the new practices have not been enough to react timely and effectively to the various public concerns (Satpayev, cited in the Karavan, 2015).



**Figure 1** – Number of Inquiries Posted on Blogs of Ministers of Kazakhstan Government

This, partly, may be explained by a number of factors. Thus, after, in 2015 anonymity of those posting on the Ministries websites was not longer guaranteed, the number of inquiries dropped further and this indicated people's concern about possible repercussions of their online activates. Further, the blogs were increasingly used by some political actors for their campaigns aimed at discrediting the state organs and certain officials at both the central and regional levels. Thus, the number of public inquiries posted on the blog of the Minister of Education and Science decreased five times from 5234 to 1051 during the period of 2012-2015. The blog of the Minister of Education was the third in terms of its popularity; there were 19 980 inquires posted there from 6 January 2012 to 11 August 2017 according to the official data provided by the government of Kazakhstan (Electronic Government of Kazakhstan, 2017)

It shall be noted that, since 2000, Kazakhstan has had eight Ministers of Education and Science: on average each minister retained the post for two years. Furthermore, each newly appointed minister came with new strategic program. Therefore, within the last 17 years, the educational system of Kazakhstan has undergone five reforms in terms of universities admission criteria and procedures. All these impacted the Minister's blog.

During the period under review, the Ministers of Education and Science received 50 inquiries on the students' matters and a number of inquiries were redirected to the Ministers of Health, as Medical Institutes function under the respective Ministry, and to some other Ministers. The inquires covered the wide range of issues as it can be seen below (see Table 1).

The table above shows that most often the inquires concerned the curriculum and academic matters (44%), transfer to another department or university (12%), financial issues (10%). In addition, there were complaints about the faculty members and administration, inquires about the scholarship and those about allegedly unlawful expulsion from the university. The inquiries on such issues as corruption, accommodation and others were not frequently submitted to the Minister.

*Blogs of University Chancellors; Students' Inquiries and Communications:* the authors, having known that blog of the Minister of Education and Science was not the only virtual platform where students may communicate their concerns, undertook to expand their study to include the websites of Kazakhstan universities that contained the blogs of Chancellors.

**Table 1** – Content of Students' Inquiries Posted on Education and Science Minister's Blog in 2012-2016

Content of Students' Inquiries	Number of Students' Inquiries
Curriculum and academic issues (admission to the Master's and Doctorate Programmes; learning of the curriculum materials and others)	22
Transfer to other university/department	6
Fees and other financial issues	5
Complaints about faculty members and administration officers	4
Bursary	3
Expulsion	2
Extra curriculum matters	1
Corruption	1
Students' accommodation and dormitories	1
Contractual obligation of state scholarship holders	1
Eligibility for state scholarship due to excellent academic performance or other circumstances	1
Internship	1
Work-study integration matters	1
Violation of students' rights	1

The initial quantitative analysis of the students' inquiries showed that on average there were 440 posts per university for the period under review (up to 10 years), in other words, there were only 44 inquiries per year. Furthermore, we now know that the total share of students making inquiries on university websites and communicating with the chancellors of their universities on the issues of their primary concern was less than 0.001% of the total number of students. Currently, the Chancellor's Blogs are

functioning in eight out of ten universities having the "National" status except for the two, namely the Kazakh National Choreographic Academy and Abay Kazakh National Pedagogical University. As for 32 universities having the "State" status, the such blogs are absent in three (see Table 2 and Table 3).

Importantly, the inquiries posted by the other users in the chancellor's blog are available for everyone to read only in five out of eight national universities.

**Table 2** – Chancellor's Blogs of National Universities in Kazakhstan

University	Chancellor's Blog	Inquiries Accessible for Reading
Gumilev Eurasian National University	Yes	Yes
Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts	Yes	Yes
Satpayev Kazakh National Technical University	Yes	Yes
Asfendiyarov Kazakh National Medical University	Yes	Yes
Kazakh National University of Arts	Yes	Yes
Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory	Yes	No
Kazakh National Agrarian University	Yes	No
al-Farabi Kazakh National University	Yes	Yes
Kazakh National Choreographic Academy	No	
Abay Kazakh National Pedagogical University	No	

**Table 3** – Chancellor’s Blogs of State Universities in Kazakhstan

University	Chancellor’s Blog	Inquiries Accessible for Reading
Serikbayev East Kazakhstan State Technical University	Yes	Yes
Amanzholov East Kazakhstan State University	Yes	Yes
Semey State Medical University	Yes	Yes
Zhansugurov Zhetysu State University	Yes	Yes
Utemisov West Kazakhstan State University	Yes	Yes
Kazakh State Women’s Pedagogical University	Yes	Yes
Karaganda State Technical University	Yes	Yes
Esenov Caspian State University of Technology and Engineering	Yes	Yes
Ualikhanov Kokshetau State University	Yes	Yes
Kostanay State Pedagogical Institute	Yes	Yes
Baytursynov Kostanay State University	Yes	Yes
Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda State University	Yes	Yes
Pavlodar State Pedagogical Institute	Yes	Yes
Toraigyrov Pavlodar State University	Yes	Yes
Kozybayev North Kazakhstan State University	Yes	Yes
Dulati Taraz State University	Yes	Yes
South Kazakhstan State Pharmaceutical Academy	Yes	Yes
Auezov South-Kazakhstan State University	Yes	Yes
Altynsarin Arkalyk State Pedagogical Institute	Yes	Yes
Zhangir Khan West Kazakhstan Agricultural and Technical University	Yes	No
Ospanov West-Kazakhstan State Medical University	Yes	No inquiries
Karaganda State Industrial University	Yes	No
Karaganda State Medical University	Yes	No
Buketov Karaganda State University	Yes	No
Rudny Industrial Institute	Yes	No
Shakarim Semipalatinsk State University	Yes	No
Taraz State Pedagogical Institute	Yes	No
Dosmukhamedov Atyrau State University	Yes, “send” bottom not functioning	
Atyrau Institute of Oil and Gas	Yes, “send” bottom not functioning	
Zhubanov Aktobe Regional State University	Web-site is being designed	
East Kazakhstan Regional State University	No	
Semipalatinsk State Pedagogical Institute	No	

As it can be seen in the table above, 18 of 29 state universities in Kazakhstan have the «Chancellor’s Blog» on their websites with all previous inquiries are available for everyone for reading.

Among the universities, the absolute leader in the number of inquiries to the Chancellor’s Blog is Amanzholov East Kazakhstan State University: 3309 inquires, in addition to which the virtual Chancellor’s

Reception Room has been opened since 2007, the university was the first in Kazakhstan to do so. The fewest number of inquiries – all in all four – have been made to the Chancellor of Pavlodar State Pedagogical Institute (se Figure 2). In terms of average number of inquiries per year, the first place is occupied by Asfendiyarov Kazakh National Medical University with an indicator of 314.9 (see Figure 2).

Only in 17 universities out of 23 universities are still maintaining their Chancellor's blogs, whereas in four websites it the time when posts were made is impossible to determine (there are no date indica-

tors), at Auezov University the earliest post dates back to 2016, whereas the Chancellor's Blog of the Kazakh State Women's Pedagogical University operated only during 2013-2014.

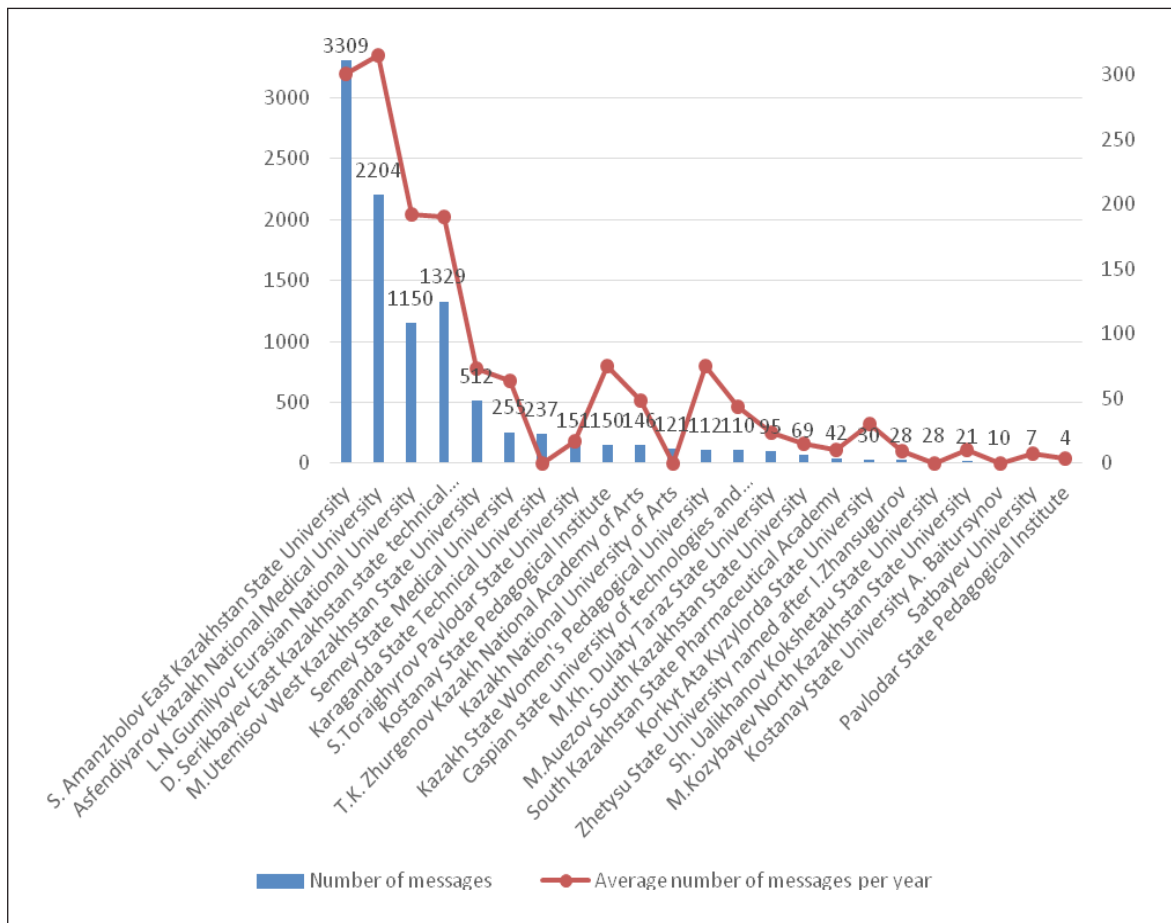


Figure 2 – Dynamics of Posting Activity on Chancellor's Blogs

The content analysis of the posts made by students on the chancellor's blogs showed that this resource is often used by them as a lever of pressure on lecturers and university staff, and also as a source of reliable information. Perhaps this is due to the fact that students do not trust the administrative staff on the department level, so they try to appeal directly to the university Chancellor via his/her internet blog.

In addition, often students ask the questions on rather mundane topics, answers to which they could have received at the dean's office or elsewhere at their respective department. However, they prefer to write directly to the Chancellor, despite the fact that they will have to wait for the answer for a few days or even months. Such a state of affairs give us the grounds to suggest that, on the one hand, the

poor performance at the department level in terms of informing their students on every-day matters or any other issues of interest to students. On the other hand, this demonstrates rather centralized style of management promoted by the leadership of many universities, where all the issues are resolved by the Chancellor; such management style is typical not only for the state, but also for many privately-owned universities in Kazakhstan.

Many students ask questions about the possibility to transfer to department of their field but in the university that is located in their native city, the major concern is that they do not know whether they will be still entitled to state grants in the case of such a transfer. This suggests that full-time students studying on paid basis, who have left home to study

in other cities try to reduce the cost of education and relieve their families from such a considerable financial burden. Similar goals are pursued by the students who receive state grants for education from the national government when they are seeking to move to their hometown and transfer to a university there and to retain their educational grant. They are well aware that their living in another city increases the financial stress for their parents. Thus, this trend suggests that parents of this category of students do not have the financial means to provide for their children's expenses during their study and the latter would also have to bear some financial cost. This indicates that the prices of education and cost associated with it are growing, while the incomes of parents remain the same or increase insignificantly. In addition, many students and their parents are interested in discounts on tuition fees, rector grants, presidential scholarships, that facts that also confirms the above hypothesis.

Thus, the content analysis revealed that the most popular topic of the inquiries made by students are those regarding academic procedures such as transfer to the other university; quotas for those from the rural regions; admission procedures for Doctorate Programmes; academic mobility; IELTS; employment perspective after graduation; entitlement for state grant in the case of military conscription; transfer of the credits for the general courses that have been already learnt and passed in the other universities; legality of the Chancellor's refusal to sign documents and other issues.

The retrospective analysis of the Internet activities on education shows that the modes of communication between students and authorities and administrations have been developing; alongside with their websites, the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan and a number of universities have opened a Facebook accounts. These days it takes less time to receive the response in the case of the individual inquiry. The contact details of the top official are available for everyone on the Internet and otherwise. The information aimed at providing guidance and clarification on the most complicated issues is available on the websites. However, these are only 0,001% of the students of Kazakhstan's universities who are willing openly raise their questions via the Internet.

The focus group discussion enabled to identify the causes for such poor activity of students. First: very few students are aware of the existing mechanism of communication. Second; feedback channels differ greatly in terms of their effectiveness and the responses are often formalized lacking any sub-

stance and do little to resolve the issue that has been raised in the inquiry. Third, students may fear that their inquiry may result in undesired complications and consequences. The respondents said, among other things that "I do not believe that my inquiry will help change anything", "We constantly feel pressure due to overload of various extracurricular activities that are empty and over formalized". In many students' opinion universities still apply outdated teaching technologies that are not aiming at personal development of students. Students think that there are no public associations in Kazakhstan that would express and channel the interests of student youth (Nassimova, 2017).

Therefore, in order to develop the effective mechanisms of promptly addressing the students' concerns expressed in their inquiries, the Ministry of Education and Science shall be recommended to launch an information campaign to raise awareness among general public about the existing modes of communications and to improve those modes to enhance considerably the quality of their feedback.

*President Nazarbayev on Student Youth: Presidential Addresses to the Nation of Kazakhstan:* Nursultan Nazarbayev has been repeatedly touching upon the problems of students. The authors conducted a content analysis of important strategic documents i.e. all the President's Addresses to the Nation of Kazakhstan. Since Kazakhstan gained its independence, the President repeatedly raised the problems of students in his Addresses to the Nation (Nazarbayev, 2004; Nazarbayev, 2005; Nazarbayev, 2007; Nazarbayev, 2009; Nazarbayev, 2011; Nazarbayev, 2014; Nazarbayev, 2015).

Among the issues regarding student youth, raised by the Head of State, are the following:

- introduction of Unified National Testing of school graduates as well as the procedures of interim assessment of university students to strengthen independent external control over the quality of education;
- establishment of the National Center for Educational Quality Assessment.
- unification of the mechanisms of university education financing from the budget. The Cabinet was instructed to increase the volume of educational grants by 50%;
- establishment of a student loan system through second-tier banks guaranteed by the state.
- better employment opportunities for students during the holidays through their recruitment into construction brigades employed in housing building as well as in the landscaping, urban planning and planting Program "Zhasyl EI";



- two-fold increase of bursaries for students studying in universities and vocational colleges of Kazakhstan;
- financial aid for low-income students so that they would be able to pay the tuition fees;
- granting to the three thousand best students the national “Bolashak” scholarship that would enable them to study in the world’s leading universities;
- introduction of state competition for schools to award the best performing ones with the grants that would allow the school-leavers from low-income families to study in more prestigious and advanced universities and colleges;
- gradual transition to make leading universities more autonomous in academic and managerial terms;
- development and introduction of an effective system to support the university and high-school students who excel academically Nation (Nazarbayev, 2004; Nazarbayev, 2005; Nazarbayev, 2007; Nazarbayev, 2009; Nazarbayev, 2011; Nazarbayev, 2014; Nazarbayev, 2015).

*Majilis Deputy Inquiries and Students' Affairs:* according to the laws of Kazakhstan, the deputies of the Majilis are entitled to request the information of the matters within the scope of their duties. During 2012-2017 (the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> Majilis), 1,402 inquiries were submitted, 35 (2.5%) of them concerned the students' matters (see Table 4).

The table above shows that the maximum number of deputy inquiries was submitted during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Session of the 5<sup>th</sup> Majilis, while the 5<sup>th</sup> Session of the 5<sup>th</sup> Majilis was the last active in this respect. The problems of students were the most popular among the deputies during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the 5<sup>th</sup> Majilis, while there were no such inquires during 5<sup>th</sup> Session of the 5<sup>th</sup> Majilis and during the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the 6<sup>th</sup> Majilis.

The Table 5 shows that the deputies of the “Nur Otan” Party submitted the inquires more often than the others followed by the Communist Party. Notably, the joint inquiries were rather common in the Majilis as well (see, table 5).

**Table 4** – Deputy Inquiries in 2012-2017\*

Majilis Session	Number of Inquiries	Number of Inquiries on Students' Matters	Inquiries on Students' Matters in %,
6 <sup>th</sup> Majilis, 2nd Session	284	8	2,8
6 <sup>th</sup> Majilis, 1st Session	87	0	0
5 <sup>th</sup> Majilis, 5th Session	52	0	0
5 <sup>th</sup> Majilis, 4th Session	226	6	2,6
5 <sup>th</sup> Majilis, 3rd Session	296	7	2,4
5 <sup>th</sup> Majilis, 2nd Session	247	9	3,6
5 <sup>th</sup> Majilis, 1st Session	210	5	2,4
Total	1402	35	2,5,

\* as of August 10, 2017.

**Table 5** – Parties' Inquiries in 2012-2017

Inquiring Party	Number of Inquiries	Percentage (%)
«Nur Otan» Party	15	42,9
Communist Party	7	20
«Nur Otan» and People's Assembly of Kazakhstan (joint inquiry)	5	14,3
“Ak Zhol” Party	3	8,6
«Nur Otan», People's Assembly of Kazakhstan, Communist Party (joint inquiry)	3	8,6
«Nur Otan», “Ak Zhol”, Communist Party (joint inquiry)	1	2,8
«Nur Otan», “Ak Zhol”, People's Assembly of Kazakhstan, Communist Party (joint inquiry)	1	2,8
People's Assembly of Kazakhstan	0	0

It is important to note that out of 86 deputies who submitted their inquiries on students' matters, 21 had previously worked in education, 15 of them had worked in higher education, 4 had been university chancellors, and 2 deputies were related to the university chancellors. In addition, 7 deputies had the experience working with the youth and education affairs in the central and local government bodies and 25 deputies had a postgraduate degree. All in all, out of 86, 39 deputies had been either the educators themselves or had been directly responsible for education affairs being civil servants on various levels of the public administration of Kazakhstan. Thus, almost half of the deputies (45%), who submitted their inquiries on students' matters were familiar with the filed through their previous experience.

The deputy inquiries covered a wide range of issues concerning students, as it can be seen below (see table 6), from social economic ones such as housing and employment to more strategic and

conceptual matters in the regard of the national educational system in its entirety and its strategic perspectives. However, the table below shows that the biggest concern of the deputies was the balance of the educational system capacity and the need of the national economy.

The most popular with the Majilis deputies were such topics as students and graduates' employment, housing (40% of students in Kazakhstan need housing). Then there were the academic and curricular issues, those of the language, values forming and character building.

The focus of the deputy inquiries reflected the trends in modern Kazakhstan that had been identified by the Ministry of Education and Science: the number of the unemployed with higher education had increased from 20.9% in 2011 to 25.9% in 2015 in the contrast to the world trend when higher education leads to reduction in unemployment. For example, in the OECD countries only 5.1% of people with degrees were unemployed (Irsaliev et al, 2016:15-16).

**Table 6** – Content of Deputy Inquiries of Students' Matters in 2012-2016

Inquiry Content	Number of Inquiries
Education and training of highly qualified professionals	7
Scholarships, including those under government order, including those on particular qualifications	6
Students' and graduates' employment	6
Students' housing and accommodation	6
Curricular matters	3
Affordable (free) education	2
Language issues (education in the Kazakh and foreign languages)	2
Improving quality of education	1
Optimization of higher education	1
Matters concerning values and ethos of students/extracurricular matters	1

According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan, the growth of the number of university graduates among the unemployed indicates declining quality of education and, possibly, lack of practical skills. This, supposedly, lead to poor demand for newly graduates in the labor market (Irsaliev et al, 2016: 37).

The findings of the focus group discussions enabled us to conclude that the problems of student youth are not fully addressed by the authorities. There are no effective ways to identify the growing difficulties and problems faced by students. According to the discussion participants, "the decisions that

the government takes in the sphere of youth policy are often situational, poorly thought through without taking into account the consequences" (Nassimova, 2017).

In general, the content analysis enabled to identify that the issues raised by the deputies are similar of those made by students. This was also evidenced during the focus-group discussions. Students noted housing as the main problematic issue as well as that of employment after graduation and too little amount of money students receive as their burse. "The money is so little we have to work, unfortunately to find a job in the field of the studies is very

difficult". "Everyone says that our burse is higher than in the other CIS countries, but they forget that the life is cheaper there too ...". In addition, during the focus-group discussion, students raised the issue of corruption. "There are students who do not attend classes, but for some reason they have high marks... I think it's corruption", "they forced me to buy their books, I think these books probably are not in demand. And we buy them because we will not get to pass our exam otherwise", "you have to pay money for the room in the university residential hall, which shall be provided for free, otherwise you will not get it" – students said (Nassimova, 2017).

*How Government Resolve Students' Issues:* corruption is one of the most pressing issues. According to the Chairman of the Agency for Civil Service and Anti-Corruption A. Shpekbayev, the education system in Kazakhstan is exposed to significant corruption risks (Tengri News, 2018). The distribution of educational and research grants remains non-transparent as well as the allocation of the budgetary funds, selection and appointment of the managerial staff, the faculty members ranking and their workload. The education system lacks effective mechanisms and procedures to identify and analyze the corruption risks as well as the personal responsibility of university chancellors and departments deans for corruption committed by their administration officers and faculty members.

Today, universities and government take efforts to counter corruption. For example, al-Farabi KazNU (2018) has introduced the electronic system to record the class attendance, academic marking; the transcripts and applications for the room in the university residential halls are also electronic. Electronic generation of examination questions, QR codes printing, encryption of examination answer sheets, online testing, the "Anti-plagiarism" system, procedural violations recording, students' assessment of their lecturers, all these are the measures against corruption. The mode of the exams taking has been changed: the examinations are conducted in written or test formats and are checked and assessed independently by ad hoc commissions that include leading professors and academics without involving the lecturers who have conducted the classes. The exams are monitored via CCTV and there is also the video recording. These measures have been introduced to exclude subjective factors when assessing students' performance and marking their work (al-Farabi KazNU, 2018).

The Student Service Center "Keremet" allows to eliminate red tape and mitigate corruption risks while students interact with university administra-

tion; it has significantly improved the quality and raised the efficiency of the administrative work aimed at resolving students' problems (al-Farabi KazNU, 2018).

The "Students Assess their Faculty Members", "Students Assess the Curator-adviser of their Group", "Graduates Assess their University", "Term without Corruption", "Well-being of Students", "Quality of Teaching, Curricular and Academic Affairs", all these polls are conducted twice a year. Students reps participate in the work of the commissions and councils established for assessing the quality of education provided, distribution the rooms in the university residential halls e.t.c..

The government take measures to solve the problem of employment of universities graduates; they guarantee the employment in the regions (villages and towns) where there is shortage on the labor market in terms of professionals in particular fields and arrange internships. The programs "With Diploma to the Village", "Internship for the Young" and "Younger Professionals" are aimed at the successful socialization of university graduates. The program "With Diploma to the Village!" stipulates for a one-time allowance amounting 70 minimum-wage coefficient, a 15-year loan from the state budget and a 25% wage premium. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 5 years since the program was launched, more than 30,000 young professionals have been able to find jobs in their chosen field (Irsaliev, et al, 2016: 314).

The program "Internship for the Young" provides the graduates an opportunity to prove themselves and acquire professional experience that may result in further employment. Salaries for the first 6 months of work are paid from the state budget (in 2015, the amount was 18 minimum-wage coefficient or 35 676 KZT). The program enables the employers to try and assess the capacities of a potential employee and familiarize him/her with the requirements of their company/organization. So far, the program has reached about 25 thousand graduates (Irsaliev et al, 2016: 315). In order to train young professionals who would meet the demands of Kazakhstan's economy, a more practical approach in education has been adopted: for the first time, legally mandatory to provide second-year students of all universities with the internship placements (Majilis RK, 2018).

The five initiatives to boost welfare state in Kazakhstan by the President of Kazakhstan stipulate for the measures to tackle the issue of housing: new residential halls will be built throughout the country.

For their construction, 118 billion KZT will be allocated within ten years (Inform KZ, 2018).

In the course of the analysis, it was revealed that there is a whole range of problems in the student environment. At the same time, it should be noted that students' question to the chancellors of universities, the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the deputies of the Majilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan differ from each other. So, if the students address the head of the relevant higher education institution that would be on the issues related to the current training, then the Minister receives the inquiries as an executive in the sphere of education and responsible for overseeing the activities of universities in the Republic, while in appeals to deputies, on the basis of which deputies' requests are formed, students may request to consider the possibility of introducing changes in legislative and regulatory documents in the field of education.

The most urgent problem for students remains accessible higher education, the quality of teaching, job placement and housing. The very fact that students actively use all possible channels of communication (blogs, social networks, appeals to public organizations and Parliament) indicates that the students want to be heard.

In turn, the authorities respond to students' requests. This happens more quickly when such a prompt reaction enables them to achieve their own strategic goals. Thus, in 2018, President Nursultan Nazarbayev launched the "Five Initiatives" to enhance welfare state in Kazakhstan, where affordability, accessibility and quality of higher education is identified as a priority direction together with improvement of the living standards of the student youth in Kazakhstan. According to President Nazarbayev's "Five Initiatives", the number of educational grants allocated from the state budget in 2018 will increase by 20,000 to reach 74,000. Additionally, the housing problem shall be addressed. Thus, by the end of 2022, the government undertakes to ensure construction of new student residential halls with a capacity to accommodate not less than 75,000 individuals.

These initiatives launched by the President, on the one hand, solve some of the most acute issues students are currently facing. On the other hand, this is how the government tries to resolve the pressing problems, in particular, to decrease the flow of migration of students from Kazakh to Russia given that the number of people migrating for educational purposes has been growing year by year. Similarly, the growth in the national construction industry, over

the past few years, has been the driver of the overall economic growth. Thus, building new residential halls shall help to stimulate economic growth, especially being implemented simultaneously with the "Affordable Housing" Program in accordance of "7-20-25" formula, when the mortgage shall not exceed 7%, the deposit necessary shall be no more than 20% and the mortgage shall be repaid within the next 25 years.

However, the authorities should take more efforts not only to stimulate economic growth due to increase of the government contracts such as the plans to build more residential halls for students. The systematic efforts are required to achieve comprehensive improvement of the quality of education. Thus, according to statistical data, the share of university graduates in Kazakhstan who have been unable to find a job exceeds 25% of the total number of unemployed. Therefore, it is clear that the graduates of Kazakhstan's universities are unable to find any employment not only that in their field of specialization, they are not in demand on the domestic labor market.

Given that availability of higher education in Kazakhstan is to be achieved via government spending that shall include the cost of 20,000 additional grants allocated annually to cover, apart from tuition fees, the students' bursar, internships in foreign universities of Master and Doctoral students, one may question whether all these measures will pay off. The question appears even more relevant and timely as the number of unemployed with university degrees in Kazakhstan is only growing.

In this regard, the state needs to tackle the most urgent issue students face these days i.e. employment after graduation. Thus, the state guarantees return of the money invested into student's education and he or she, in turn, will contribute to the development of the country. Moreover, while stimulating employment and accessibility of housing, the authorities also reduce social tension as well as prevent discontent and deprivation among young people.

## Conclusions

The article discusses the problems concerning students in Kazakhstan revealed by the authors through applying the content analysis technique of the data that is contained at the blogs of Minister of Education and Science, number of university chancellors, and the Majilis of the Parliament of the RK. This method, together with a more conventional content analysis techniques applied upon such textual materials as the Addresses of the President to

the Nation of Kazakhstan, government report, and focus-group discussions transcripts, proved to be rather fruitful. The authors concluded that it could be suggested using such a method further to complement (but not to substitute) more comprehensive sociological surveys. The authors' argument in favor of the content analysis of the internet resources, particularly of on-line communication between the general public and the authority figures or the state bodies is two-fold.

Firstly, in terms of drawing new analytical techniques based on collecting and processing the data from the internet communication into the academic and research practices in Kazakhstan such a novel approach expands considerably the access to the factual information that, in turn, impacts positively the validity of the findings. Given that the Internet (e-government, Facebook accounts and others) is an increasingly common mode of communication of the state and citizens, it would be rather insensible to overlook a such resource, which has great potential to enrich considerably any scholarly endeavor. For

those focusing their research interest on the problematics of the youth such a method is of particular benefit as the younger is one's study population the more likely they are to use the Internet.

Secondly, the authors consider such an approach to be rather sensible also in terms of enhancing good governance. While more conventional surveys provide the bulk of data for the subsequent analysis for both academic researchers, government experts as well as for those working in government-affiliated and independent think tanks, the ad hoc content analysis of the online communication between the authority figures and state bodies with the citizens would enable those in the government and beyond to be more prompt, to detect challenges of more acute and time-sensitive nature and, consequently to develop the mechanisms to address them that would be more effective and express. The authors resolved to apply such a technique in the future while studying the problems of the youth, students and young professionals, educational migration, civil society, public associations and others.

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