

Overview of the Impact of the Use of Technology on “The New Normal” in Graduate Studies: Reviews on Change of Study Habits During and After Pandemic”

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Abstract

“Technological development has affected legal education as much as it has affected other disciplines. In particular, graduate students in the field of law were affected by the technological impact in the "new normal" created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Study habits have changed with the pandemic and these changed habits had some positive and negative effects on graduate studies. The pandemic has affected all student groups at various levels. Graduate students, on the other hand, were affected by the closure caused by the epidemic at a level that would affect their academic studies, and this negative effect could be reduced by the effective use of technology.

While undergraduate students were able to participate in their courses with distance education, graduate students had problems especially in research, traveling to other countries and using resources and study areas in campuses. COVID restrictions have changed the study habits of LLM and doctoral students, especially on the research and thesis stages. Research, travel and participation in symposiums for this purpose is an indispensable form of study for graduate students. The change in this way of working has caused the change of methods that have been in practice for a long time, and graduate students are faced with a new working principles. The negative effects of this new situation have been tried to be eliminated by the use of online opportunities by both universities, advisors and students. These effects and its consequences will probably continue after the pandemic.

Keywords: Graduate studies, change of study methods, new normal, pandemic effect, use of technology

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused various changes in the world since March 2020. Students in different countries endeavour to adapt this “new normal” by changing their study routines, how they research, travel and attend academic events. Technology and digital capabilities have played an important role in addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic. Graduate students accomplish their studies with a working discipline that adapts to the new routine in research techniques with the use of technological devices. However, this adaptation process has become a challenge for graduate students.

The use of technology during pandemic has also created new questions for graduate students: Can online system replace the traditional methods of graduate studies on legal education? What are the changes of research techniques for graduate students after libraries have closed? How can students overcome the disadvantage of lockdown restrictions? What should be the new study routines that should continue after the pandemic? Questions continue to increase for graduate students on legal field during the pandemic lockdown, and with new restrictions, their study habits have begun to change profoundly. With the end of the pandemic, students and universities probably may not be able to return to the traditional study methods after the pandemic.

In this study, the effect of the pandemic and the use of technology created by the new normal on graduate students in legal education will be discussed together with its positive and negative aspects with Turkish practices, and suggestions will be made about the practices that should be continued in the post-pandemic period.

2. The Pandemic Effect on Legal Graduate Studies

a. *The Changing of Study Habits*

Students doing graduate studies have been affected by the pandemic in various ways, regardless of the country they live in or the field they work in. The necessity of being at home created by the pandemic has also increased the tendency towards technology, and this has also affected the way graduate students work. The negative aspect of this effect in terms of graduate students in the field of law is related to access to resources.

Prohibitions and limitations such as the closure of facilities, libraries and universities during the pandemic have restricted from their main study places- libraries. Naturally, writing a thesis generally requires a chosen loneliness, especially for doctoral students. Although this "selected quarantine" resembles the prohibitions brought by the

pandemic, it has prevented graduate students from accessing resources by blocking the channels they feed on.

Since March 2020, many universities and libraries closed or limited their physical facilities. The inability to benefit from places such as study areas in campuses causes problems in accessing resources and find a convenient place to study. Graduate students who used to study at institutes and libraries have been confined to their homes and have started having problems with being able to access resources. Technical problems such as the fact that some of the old printed books are still unavailable on online databases, and the unavailability of some language books in PDF format are negatively affecting the studies of graduate students. Besides, the pandemic has shown that these resources are not sufficient and online access to all resources in all languages is not convenient for all students.²

The fact that some old editions and basic books are only available in a limited number of libraries has often led students to obtain these resources from libraries. Moreover, students benefit from libraries and institutes since they cannot get all the resources written on the subjects they research. Most of the students doing graduate studies in the field of law obtain basic books, annotations and court decisions in printed, especially in Turkey. The fact that not all of the resources were transferred to digital databases negatively affected the students doing research in this field. It can be stated that online libraries cannot replace physical access to resources, especially considering that most of the old edition commentaries and books are not reprinted and have a limited number of copies. The lack of access to libraries during the pandemic therefore, created a resource problem for students

b. The Negative Effects on International Students

In many parts of the world, master's and doctoral students travel to other institutes and universities in different countries to do their research as a study method. Students who conduct comparative studies in certain institutions and universities in these countries can enrich their theses and through contact with the professors in those universities.

During the pandemic, the travel ban and transportation difficulties are one of the main challenges faced by graduate students³, especially for those whose study field is on comparative law. Students who were deprived of this opportunity due to travel bans and countries closing their borders had to settle for only digital databases. Therefore, one of the main problems faced by graduate students in their studies (especially in

² Also check: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jan/29/price-gouging-from-covid-student-ebooks-costing-up-to-500-more-than-in-print>.

³ https://escholarship.org/content/qt43q5g2c9/supp/International_Students_Experiences_and_Concerns.pdf p. 3.

comparative studies) is to study a subject without going to that related country.⁴ For example, a student who has a master's or doctorate degree in law may not be able to go to a university, institute or various programs in Germany, France, England or the United States, for example, meeting with academics and establishing dialogue with them, due to pandemic restrictions. The purpose of graduate students going to programs in other countries is not just to have easy access to academic comparative law resources, but also slightly important to improve foreign languages, to communicate with the academicians and students in that country, and to see the examples in practice by visiting the courts or relevant institutions of those countries regarding the field of research, especially in the field of law.

The opportunity to meet other graduate students working in that field by attending different academic programs and conferences at a foreign university, participating workshops, speaking and discussing with academics is another situation that pandemic restrictions have lifted. Networking opportunities with academics and other foreign students were also negatively affected in this period. Students do not have any chance to meet and talk to other students and academics related to their research topics.

c. Social Problems and Economic Differences

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact has made evident social inequalities and disparities⁵ Internet access is not equal in every city and region. This inequality could be resolved by students who could not easily connect to the internet at home before the pandemic, using the internet outdoors for resource research and using the facilities on university campuses.

Another issue apart from the internet is that everyone is at home during the pandemic and graduate students (if they are not living alone) are working in a crowded family environment. Master's and doctorate studies, especially at the writing stage, is generally a lonely process even though it is fed by the use of resources and academic discussions. This period, which requires a person to concentrate on the computer, is interrupted by problems such as the presence of everyone at home, children at home because their schools are closed, or lack of independent workspace.⁶ Since not every student has the same socio-economic conditions, problems with internet connection, common use of computers

⁴ See, Donohue, William J./ Lee, Alice Shu-Jhu/ Simpson, Shelah Y./ Vacek, Kathleen, "Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Doctoral Students' Thesis Dissertation Progress", *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, Vol. 16, 2021, p. 542.

⁵ See, Aucejo, Esteban/ French, Jacob/ Araya, Paola Ugalde/ Zafar, Basit, "COVID-19 is Widening Inequality in Higher Education", August 2020, <https://voxeu.org/article/covid-19-widening-inequality-higher-education>.

⁶ See, Donohue/ Lee / Simpson/ Vacek, p. 541- 542.

at home, and poor physical working conditions have also negatively affected the working routines of graduate students.

Before pandemic, students who did not have a convenient place to study at their homes or dormitories could go to universities, libraries, or outside cafes. With the restrictions of pandemic, some students do not have access to university and library facilities or cafes and many do not have internet connection or lack of convenient study areas in their homes.

The pandemic process has brought economic disadvantages as well as social disadvantages. Some survey studies were conducted on this subject and according to the results of the survey, it was stated that graduate students were negatively affected economically during the pandemic process.⁷ In these studies, some suggestions on how to eliminate these economic effects are also presented. For example, in one study, it was stated that students who did not experience job loss during the pandemic period and who had a good economic situation were less affected by the negative effects of the pandemic.⁸ The situation of students who have become disadvantaged during the pandemic due to socio-economic differences is also seen in the survey results and it is mentioned that universities and various institutions support students with scholarships and various supports.⁹ According to another survey result, students suggested increasing financial aid and reducing tuitions.¹⁰ Some graduate students whose workplaces were closed during the pandemic faced the threat of not being able to afford their education.¹¹ Considering this special situation, various scholarship and aid opportunities should be put into practice.

3. The Use of Technology For Legal Graduate Studies During Pandemic

a. Accessibility to Online Resources

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused various problems in terms of access to hardcopy resources and travel for students doing graduate

⁷ In the survey study conducted on 3,500 graduate students in 2020, the economic effects of the pandemic on students were also included. See in detail:

https://www.montana.edu/covid19_rapid/updated%20NSF_RAPID_GraduateStudentExperiences_Covid19_White_Paper.pdf.

⁸ Aristovnik/Kerzic/Ravselj/Tomazevic/Umek, p. 7

⁹ Aristovnik/Kerzic/Ravselj/Tomazevic/Umek, p. 23.

¹⁰ See, <https://info.umkc.edu/unews/graduate-student-council-releases-survey-on-effects-of-covid-19/>.

¹¹ Also check, https://www.norc.org/PDFs/Graduate%20Studies%20COVID/NORC_COVIDWhitePaper_2021_FINAL.PDF, p. 9 See, Donohue/ Lee / Simpson/ Vacek, p. 545.

studies in the field of law; however, it has also provided an advantage on accessing online resources .

The new normal with the pandemic has created a new generation education and study model where students do independent research during lockdown.¹² With online databases of libraries and online platforms, students can benefit from these resources without the need for physical access.¹³

Research in universities and institutions abroad, which has been a tradition for a very long time, has evolved into another model of studying with pandemic restrictions. The closure of the borders of countries and the limited transportation of students even in the same city caused graduate students to carry out all their studies on computers only. It is clear that inability to travel creates difficulties for graduate students. However, universities such as MIT have made their online libraries available to students free of charge, making it possible to access resources online during pandemic.¹⁴ Thus, for example, a student living in Istanbul writing a thesis in comparative law can easily benefit from the digital library of a university in Australia.

It has been a great advantage for the students who are in the course phase of the master's and doctoral programs which offer online courses to students during this period. It may also be stated that being able to access many articles without even leaving home accelerates students in terms of research. It is clear that this technological new normal creates an advantage for students who can access a large pool of resources that they did a limited chance before pandemic.

b. World-Wide Access to Academic Events

Increased online academic events during the pandemic enabled students to participate in academic events in different countries. Before the pandemic, it was necessary to attend conferences and seminars in person since everything was done using traditional methods. For this, students who encounter problems (such as having to get permission from their work, funding for travel, etc.) may participate in many activities online during this period.

¹² See, Teras, Marko/ Souranta, Juha/ Teras, Hanna/ Curcher, Mark, "Post- Covid-19 Education and Education Technology "Solutionism": A Seller's Market", *Postdigital Science and Education*, 2020, p. 864-865.

¹³ Price, Sara/ Oliver, Martin/ Fartunova, Maria/ Jones, Chris/ van der Meij, Hans/ Mjijelstad, Stig/ Mohammad, Fitri/ Nikolov, Roumen/ Wake, Jo/ Wasson, Barbara, "Review of the impact of technology-enhanced learning on roles and practices in Higher Education", *Kaleidoscope Deliverable 30.2.1*, January 2005, p. 4. 7- 9.

¹⁴ Eg. <https://news.mit.edu/2020/mit-press-offers-free-e-resources-during-covid-19-pandemic-0409>.

By participating in virtual workshops, graduate students have had the opportunity not only to be a passive listener, but also actively participate from the comfort of their home.¹⁵ These events have given students a great advantage. For example, a student in Turkey had the opportunity to follow a conference in the United Kingdom or a graduate student in France has been able to participate in a workshop held in India. Additionally, graduate students who follow conferences, seminars and symposiums related to their subjects have opportunities that most universities and organizations did not offer before the pandemic, so the pandemic period has almost become an advantage for graduate students in this respect.

4. How Should It Be After Pandemic?

The pandemic has reshaped the study routines of graduate students in various ways. Although some of these changes affect the work negatively, however, some new practices using technology should be continued after the pandemic because they are beneficial. Continuing efficient practices after the pandemic will be important for students both in terms of practical and in terms of increasing the quality of research resources.

The first practice that should be continued after the pandemic is online courses. Unlike undergraduate education, graduate courses are held with fewer people. In these courses, which are held with the participation of few people, academic discussions with online participation do not have disadvantages in terms of student participation. Before the pandemic, some programs were offering online graduate courses and experiencing the positive results of this.¹⁶ However, during the pandemic, even the programs that had face-to-face lessons had to return to online, and in fact, its advantages began to be understood with this mandatory situation. Since it is possible for graduate students to work in other places or live in other cities, the participation of online graduate courses can be productive. For example, in Turkey, students enrolled in graduate programs in the field of law can work as research assistants at other universities in other cities. In addition, judges, prosecutors and lawyers are also enrolled in master's and doctoral programs; these students cannot attend all courses due to workload. In my opinion, online courses will increase the participation for students. The survey conducted by YÖK

¹⁵ See, Raja/Nagasubramani, p. 34.

¹⁶ See, Pistone, Michele, "Law Schools and Technology: Where We Are and Where We Are Heading", *Journal of Legal Education*, Vol. 64, No. 4, May 2015, p. 593- 594.

(Higher Education Institution) in Turkey also shows the desire of graduate students for online courses.¹⁷

Another reason for the new normal which should continue after the pandemic is the online access of academic events. Naturally, in academic conferences, panels and symposiums that are physically attended, students meet many academicians and students besides listening to academic lectures and have the opportunity to discuss between during coffee breaks. However, the simultaneous online monitoring of face-to-face academic conferences after the pandemic will also be beneficial for many students who cannot be physically present.¹⁸

Another practice that need to be continued and even developed after the pandemic is the digital transfer of all books in the field of law. It will be convenient for students to be able to access all editions by transferring them to online databases. All journals and publications, including outdated editions, should be digitized and printed court decisions should be made available online. In addition, resources that are no longer republished should also have online access.

It should be noted that when the pandemic is completely over (maybe after 6 months - 1 year or 2 years) academicians and students will often return to their pre-pandemic routines. However, students will probably continue to take benefit from the advantages of the new normal even after pandemic.

5. Conclusion

Graduate students were confined to their homes as a result of the curfews due to the effect of the pandemic, and the use of libraries and outdoor spaces were less than before this period. In this period, students who could not go abroad to do research, stayed away from academics and researchers due to canceled academic activities, and could not access

¹⁷ According to the survey based on the result of the participation of 1 million 255,000 students from 207 universities, 35% of the graduate students who are enrolled in Masters Program think that the courses should be completely online after the pandemic and %32.2 of them suggested that hybrid system which contains both online and face-to-face courses. 32.4% of the students voted that after pandemic, we should continue to face-to-face classes as it is usual. According to the students who are in doctorate program, 39.5% of students think that hybrid system should be adopted, 34.1% of the students are in favor of online education and 26.4% of them are in favor of face-to-face education. See, the chart at page 10: <https://covid19.yok.gov.tr/Documents/anketler/ogrenci-anket-sonuclari.pdf>

¹⁸ For example, Bahçeşehir University organized many online academic events during the pandemic period. In addition to students living in different cities in Turkey, participants from different countries also participated in these activities and productive academic discussions were held. <https://bau.edu.tr/content/16079-vision-and-mission>; <https://bau.edu.tr/content/16080-transnational-law-week-legal-education-and-lawyering-in-the-age-of-the-%E2%80%9Cnew-normal%E2%80%9D>

some resources due to closed libraries, were able to turn the disadvantages into advantages in some respects with the use of technology.

It will be possible to create great differences with very basic solutions both during the course phase, field researches and thesis writing phases. In the transforming world, it can be inconvenient to carry out graduate studies in the field of law with traditional methods. The renewal of these methods and their adaptation to technology should be seen as inevitable.

Students, academicians, researchers miss the old normal, old study habits, libraries, campuses where academic conversations take place. However, although students miss the old routines, people have better understood the blessings of the digital world during the COVID-19 era. After the pandemic, graduate students in legal field may demand different techniques to be adapted by universities and institutes and maybe it is time for traditional graduate study routines to be changed with the use of technology.

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