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Changes in the Teaching of Literature: A Study of Practices in the English Language and Literature Department at Çankaya University during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

During the COVID-19 pandemic, academics and students have had to respond to the unexpected and unplanned shift from face-to-face to online teaching. Since teaching and learning through online portals has been a new experience, this has prompted the academics in the English Language and Literature Department at Çankaya University to seek alternative and creative ideas to promote student productivity, participation and motivation. The aim of this case study is to discuss how the course materials, teaching methods and assessment have been redesigned to meet the needs of online education during the pandemic. With the examples from changes in the syllabi, student survey and sample student responses, this study also reveals how the academics in the department have had an opportunity to re-evaluate systems of teaching both on and offline and to refresh their role as instructors.

KEYWORDS

Online teaching; literary studies; class participation; student motivation; online education; COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Turkish institutions of education, including the universities were locked down in March 2020. The fast, unexpected, and unplanned shift from face-to-face to online teaching for academics as well as students will be studied in the long run. This is a case study conducted by the Department of English Language and Literature at Çankaya University, Ankara, Turkey to develop certain strategies in course design for the purpose of adapting to a new form of teaching on online communication platforms such as Zoom. Within this perspective, the reading materials, teaching methods, and assessment have been reconsidered and modified. While one aim is to increase student participation in class discussions done on the Zoom platform through developing their creativity and motivation, the other is to find new ways for online assessment to prevent various acts of cheating. First, this study will evaluate the courses that had already been offered during the 2019–2020 spring semester in the fifth week of which the lockdown was announced, and second, it will disclose the changes in the programme of the 2020–2021 fall semester, when the university senate decided to continue teaching online.

In language and literature departments in Turkey, mainly two methods of teaching are utilised, depending on student numbers, and the particular demands and teaching outcomes of certain courses. While some courses are often but not exclusively conducted with an emphasis on lecture-based learning, others are developed around class discussions during which student participation is relatively more significant to the learning process. Our tendency at the Department of English Language and Literature at Çankaya University, however, is to encourage student participation in class activities and discussions, to develop their critical thinking skills, to enable collaboration with their classmates and instructors in a more vivid and creative learning atmosphere, and to make them synthesise all these for gaining new knowledge, attitude and awareness. Carrillo and Flores similarly underline the significance of ‘the active participation of both teachers and students in the online teaching and learning process’ (2020, 475). Since teaching and learning through online portals has inevitably led to a decrease of student participation, this has prompted us to seek new, innovative and creative ideas to promote student productivity and engagement with their courses, as well as to enable them to come to terms with the times they are living in, and the historical importance of what they are experiencing. By combining academic studies with their own experiences, students often come to a better understanding of the subject matter, and gain a deeper awareness of the relationship between theoretical approaches and real life experiences.

This collaborative approach to literature education in Turkey opens up new possibilities in course design. For example, writing before the pandemic, Steven A. Meyers shows how transformative pedagogy can be used as an effective strategy in teaching online. Meyers emphasises ‘more collegial ... informal’ and ‘relatively egalitarian’ (2008, 219) qualities of online teaching, and states that these qualities may provide an appropriate atmosphere in which the traditional ‘patterns of power and dominance’ (2008, 219) between the instructor and students may change and give way to a more sincere and comfortable interaction in the online class. He also underlines the possibility that students may become more open to share their personal experiences, feelings, and beliefs online ‘because of the level of anonymity afforded by the Internet’ (2008, 219). After stating the positive qualities of online teaching environment, Meyers mentions five practical suggestions to be used in online classes: ‘(a) create a safe and inviting environment; (b) encourage students to think about their experiences, beliefs, and biases; (c) use teaching strategies that promote student engagement and participation; (d) pose real-world problems that address societal inequalities; (e) help students implement action-oriented solutions’ (2008, 220). Below we will dwell on how we have adapted our strategies and course design to promote student participation through relating the reading material to real-world problems as mentioned in (c) and (d), how we have reconsidered the ways of assessment to encourage the students to think about their personal experiences as mentioned in (b), and how we have focused on the interaction between the students and the instructors to create a safe and inviting environment as suggested in (a). What is expected out of this reconsideration is to ask students to rethink about the value of literature and the analysis of culture in coping with problems in times of crisis.

2019-2020 spring semester

After the COVID-19 lockdown in Turkey in March 2020, Çankaya University's higher administration asked the instructors to choose whether to do asynchronous or synchronous online teaching, and the course materials and assessment tools were rearranged in accordance with the changing conditions and needs of our students. Initially, 70% of the undergraduate courses were done online via the zoom platform whereas 30% of the instruction was asynchronous. Due to this abrupt change in the medium of education during the spring semester of 2019–2020 academic year, both the students of the department and the academics had some difficulty adapting to the new system. The students mainly complained about the load of assignments and reading material, especially in the case of asynchronous teaching. In the student survey conducted by the department at the end of the fall semester, the students also expressed their problems related to concentration and stress as well as taking notes and technical difficulties, such as weak Internet connection, lack of camera and microphone.¹ The academics, on the other hand, spent time to compensate for the lack of face-to-face education by trying to find new and more motivating ways of teaching and implementing them in their classes. Their main problems were insufficient student motivation and concentration, lack of interaction due to the virtual teaching-learning environment, similar technical problems, plagiarism and cheating in the assignments and examinations.

One of the courses offered in this transition period was the elective course Text and Performance. The premise of the course was to focus on analysing selected texts and their adaptation and transformation in diverse modes of performance, such as theatrical production, dance, music or film. In the case of dramatic works, this involved taking, say, a Shakespeare tragedy or a modern play and examining stage productions in different periods of time to see how they are modified in various social and historical contexts. Other types of transformations considered were the relation between oral adaptations of texts and their transcriptions or recordings; or the adaptation of poems, novels or historical documents to oral expression, the opera, ballet, symphony, song, film, or avant-garde performance. Students were also expected to study the texts of the poems of their own choice and recite them to an audience composed of students and academics. The main activity on behalf of the students, however, would be taking part and responsibility in the staging of a selected play which was determined as Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*.

The first five weeks of the semester passed as planned with workshops by some actors and directors on how to stage a play and doing preparations for staging *Trifles*. But when the lockdown was announced and the classes were suspended for two weeks in mid-March, an abrupt and fast change in weekly activities, and the reading-discussion material was inevitable in order to be able to adapt to the requirements of online teaching-learning. In this context, some of the precautions taken and readjustments made were as follows:

1. Because the main activity of staging *Trifles* was cancelled, new texts and some relevant performances were added to the reading/watching-discussion list. They were:

- (a) *Amadeus* by Peter Shaffer; *Amadeus* by Milos Forman
- (b) *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw; *My Fair Lady* by George Cukor

2. Reading/watching in advance and discussion in class was kept as it used to be, but via the Zoom platform. At this point it should be underlined that only really motivated and willing students were able to benefit from online classes that were almost the same as the face-to-face ones in terms of preparation and execution.

3. Students, who had been given the assignment of reciting poems, were directed to various Internet sources as well as in-class practices to get themselves prepared for the assignment. Reading poems aloud is accepted as an effective practice enabling students to understand and experience the literary, aesthetic, and musical qualities of poetry. When they are left alone to do this, students rarely undertake and execute such tasks and when they are forced to do it in class, due to stage fright, peer judgement, lack of confidence and such, they usually feel embarrassed, which inevitably blocks or weakens their performance. In line with Meyers' argument on transformative pedagogy, online teaching-learning environment, on the other hand, provided students with a psychologically more secure and comfortable atmosphere in which they managed to overcome their embarrassment and anxiety within their private sphere. They recorded their individual poetry readings and shared them in the online class. Their reactions to their own and peer performances were quite positive and showed that they successfully eliminated social psychological barriers. Furthermore, when the poems were analysed and discussed in class after the performances, it became clear that their understanding and appreciation of poems in particular, and poetry in general increased.

4. Instead of staging *Trifles* due to the cancellation of rehearsals, students were given the task of recording their short videos in which they were expected to show their individual acting performances related to the texts of their own choice.

The results of both poetry reading and performance recordings showed that students were able to enjoy and employ their imaginative and creative skills even under conditions of isolation. Moreover, they expressed that these kinds of activities gave them the chance to explore new possibilities in their own capabilities, to reconsider the problems during the pandemic, and to experience the healing effects of literature and art. At the same time, they came to understand the importance of accessing and organising reliable sources on the Internet, and synthesising the material for their own use.

2020-2021 fall semester

Throughout the summer, predicting that teaching would continue online in the following academic year, academics worked on adapting the teaching material and assessment of the courses they would teach in 2020–2021. Although demanding, this forced change in the way the classes are conducted has led to some refreshing ideas. As Hawk Chang also suggests, 'the COVID-19 crisis has unexpectedly made it possible for teachers to re-examine the downfalls of traditional offline teaching and the potential for teaching when incorporating an increased number of online elements' (2021, 8). Given the time to prepare, this was an opportunity to notice the technical advantages of virtual teaching, and to investigate the capabilities of the Zoom platform. The necessity for change became evident even in courses that comparatively remain stable from year to year in terms of textual material, and provided the opportunity, both for academics and students, to be more creative.

For online classes, two effective ways of creating motivation have come to the fore. The first is to insert spontaneous ‘points of interest’ into lecture/discussion of any literary material which will link the text to current issues. This might attract the attention of distracted students if done in an improvisational way. When, for instance, students are given the impromptu task of finding the video of a song based on a poem and of comparing these two modes of representation, they usually show greater excitement and enthusiasm to be part of the experience and discussion. Compared to face-to-face education, since they are already in front of the screen, they have the flexibility to move between different virtual frames and immediately share their findings with the class. The second is to give students new and alternative tasks in which they can simultaneously show their learning and creativity. Especially, writing tasks in different genres, such as writing diaries and letters or shooting films, stimulate students’ interaction and help their development in critical thinking as well as improving different modes of expression.

Among the courses offered in 2020–2021 academic year fall semester, two courses made major changes in the course material as well as assessment, namely the third-year course 18th-Century Literature and the fourth-year course World Literature. The former course covers not only a variety of topics like marriage, colonialism, journalism, English politics but also of genres ranging from diary and essay to poetry and fiction. Regarding the content of this course, such accounts of lethal events were included in the syllabus to enable the students to have a critical view of the events that left a mark in history and to comprehend the COVID-19 pandemic that has changed contemporary everyday life to a large extent, and to cope with the difficulties it brings along. To illustrate, the excerpts about the Great Fire and the Great Plague of London in Samuel Pepys’s *The Diary* were included in the reading list of this course in the fall semester to discuss the characteristics of a diary and how it reflects the cultural, socio-economic and political events of the period. In a similar vein, as suggested by Meyers, the students were asked to write about their thoughts, feelings and reactions towards the COVID-19 pandemic, how they have personally coped with this period and whether they considered the pandemic as a crisis or opportunity as well as specific events, news, and so on.

Their diaries consisted of an introduction entry in which the students explained what they wanted their diary to be about and other entries, including accurate knowledge of history, discussion of the pandemic today, and its impact on their life, their country and the world. A few diary entries were published in the special issue of the department’s student newspaper.² These entries revealed the students’s personal experiences and how they related these experiences to the literary and critical texts. Here are some of the published excerpts from the student entries:

Student A: During this pandemic, I learned [self-worth] . . . Maybe you should just love yourself more and care more about yourself. It doesn’t seem wise to wait for a new year to cheer you up; rather than that, I believe every day is a new day and should be appreciated as if it is the new year you have waited for so much.

Student B: Our last meeting was not so good because of the earthquake,³ but I can say that we got good news afterwards. Although we lost a lot of people and were sad, hopeful things also happened . . . As always, after something bad happened, precautions were taken. I wish it were not like this. Speaking of these feelings, I remembered something we learned and talked in Özlem teacher’s theory class which is called Allegory of the Cave. On the one hand pandemic, on the other hand, earthquakes, and all we can do is sit down

and follow the news. So, it reminds me of the prisoners in the cave because we are also like them chained in our homes without moving and all we can do is watching TV to learn about the pandemic and how it is going and things like that, so the cave is like the screen we are watching nowadays.

Student C: We were not meeting with people because of the quarantine, and now we had to stay away from each other in the house. It was a very depressing time. As if this was not enough, this was the period when social media involves mostly ... fake news ... There is a book called *The Hunger Games*. They put people on a platform and want them to kill each other. The last survivor wins the game. At the end of each day, the names and pictures of people who died are reflected to the sky in the book. Our current situation was no different from that book. We were infecting each other and causing each other's deaths, and at the end of the day, the Minister of Health announced the number of people who died.

Student D: This pandemic was both the worst thing that happened to me and the best thing at the same time. I have never been a person who needed anyone all the time. I love being alone and gathering my thoughts and doing things alone sometimes. I actually need that from time to time but I apparently didn't appreciate it as much as I thought ... At first I lost myself but eventually as I got used to the situation I found myself. Still it was a depressing time and it was hard to keep living your life to the fullest, but rather than sitting and doing nothing, I found other activities. I started memorising new songs and singing them and doing it to relax myself which as always worked like a charm but the downside is that I can't sing 24/7. I have also made myself a 'to read' list of books that I have always wanted to read and some world literature classics and self-improvement books. I have gained my reading habit once again.

These student reflections demonstrate their personal experiences and reactions towards the pandemic and ways of coping with its impact on their lives. While students A and D focus on their personal experience by writing about how they (re)discovered themselves, students B and C explained the pandemic period by drawing an analogy between their current life and the one presented in different texts. As these sample excerpts reveal, diary assignment proves to be crucial not only in developing the students' self-expression through writing but also, as Meyers puts it, in 'help[ing] students self-reflect, connect experiences with social issues, and reach an understanding of course material' (2008, 220).

A similar indication of diverse thoughts and feedback recurs in the student responses to a bonus question requiring their evaluation of the diary writing assignment in the final examination.⁴ Fourteen students out of fifteen answered the question with positive feedback except one who was not willing to share his/her personal feelings and thoughts. The answers can be grouped under three titles: realisation, relief and recollection. Six students stated that the diary writing assignment enabled them to realise how their life changed, how they learned to embrace those changes and think positively, how they understood the value of the moment and the importance of relationships, physical contact and communication. Four students emphasised how keeping a diary reduced their stress by providing some relief because they were able to express their thoughts and feelings honestly without a concern in their mind. Finally, four students regarded this assignment as a recollection and a historical document of the pandemic, including not only personal reflections but also facts about the number of COVID-19 cases,

government policies, the conditions of the hospitals, and the vulnerability of people ranging from health care professionals to the elderly. The answers provided the instructor an insight into the physical and psychological state of the students during the pandemic and feedback for potential course development in terms of the selection of materials and assessment. The instructor plans to include diary assignment in future courses, regardless of whether the course is delivered through face-to-face or online teaching. This is because almost all the students were eager to be self-reflective in diary writing and revealed that it was a relief to write about their feelings, opinions and reactions to a real-world problem.

Apart from assigning the creative task of writing a diary, each student in the 18th-Century Literature course was assigned one of the topics in the syllabus to prepare a student-led discussion in class to provoke their active involvement in the learning process. Although similar tasks are often assigned in face-to-face teaching, more space was allotted to these activities so that they would be more engaged in the material. In hindsight, this would be a welcome addition to face-to-face course design. The selected topics for these discussions are listed below:

1. Do research on significant events like the Great Fire and the Great Plague which had a devastating impact on people and societies. Some guiding questions could be: What happened? – When did it happen? – How did the event affect the country/the people/the environment/life etc.? – Find visual material (photographs, drawings, paintings etc.) – What kind of media and/or writing style was used to discuss these events? – What is your personal opinion/reflection on such events happening throughout history?

2. Do research on how the concept of marriage has changed throughout history. Describe the culture/the society/the family etc. What medium of communication (letter, essay, novel, story, drama, blog, photography, painting etc.) was/is used to discuss/present the concept of marriage? If you were given the responsibility to organise a society, what would be your ideal society in terms of marriage/gender relations?

3. Do research on how personal essays (letter, periodical essay) evolved from the 18th century to the 21st century. Find examples including magazines, journals, emails, messages, snapchat, and so on. What are they about? Why are they written? Present your personal opinion/reflections on these personal writings and the topics/subjects they cover.

After analysing a particular text assigned for that week, the student in question made a mini-presentation by informing their friends about the above topics, and by doing so, they led a discussion in the form of question and answer. This provided an opportunity for the instructor to step back for a while and empowered the students to share their opinions and feelings. The instructor also facilitated these discussions by expressing her comments after student presentations and peer sharing. In this way, she created an inviting environment ‘by validating students’ contributions and opinions, remaining attentive to students’ reactions and emotions . . .’ (Meyers 2008, 220). Also, the students who complained about isolation from their peers and loss of friendship during the pandemic⁵ could at least contact one another on a virtual platform and overcome the negative impact of solitary life at home.

Another activity rearranged for online instruction was response paper writing, which is a task the students are familiar with in face-to-face education. In the online adaptation of the task, the students were responsible not only for writing their response papers but

also for presenting their personal reflections on the assigned texts such as Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels – Part I (A Voyage to Lilliput)* from an analytical perspective and discussing their ideas in class. Similar to the student-led discussion, this activity also created interactive class participation among the students and helped them gain confidence in oral communication.

In the World Literature course, the instructor decided to devote the first half of the semester to the discussion of literary works that deal with the theme of survival through storytelling. The aim here was to increase students' awareness about the healing effect of literature during times of crisis and for this aim the first text that was discussed was *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, followed by the frame-narrative of and stories from *One Thousand and One Nights* and Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, Turgenev's 'The District Doctor' and Kafka's 'A Country Doctor'. In the discussions of the first text, the focus was on how Gilgamesh achieves immortality through the carving of his story on stone, while in the case of Scheherazade storytelling is an act of survival. After focusing on how Boccaccio designed his collection of stories as a form of escape from the plague in Florence, Turgenev and Kafka's stories were discussed within the framework of storytelling as a form of confession.

Apart from changes in the course material, the instructor also made alterations in the examination questions and means of assessment. Due to possible acts of cheating and/or plagiarism in the examinations and assignments, the instructor tried to get over this problem by finding creative tasks and questions instead of knowledge-based ones. In the quizzes, for instance, questions related to the students' personal response to the reading material were asked.⁶ Similar to the diary writing task in the previously discussed course, the instructor of World Literature asked students to write a letter to a fictional character or an author of their choice,⁷ telling the addressee about their experiences during the pandemic and discussing whether storytelling as well as reading literature helped them cope with this crisis. Some students chose characters who were in a similar imprisoned situation like themselves and wrote about how the character would empathise with the students' feelings of isolation. As in the case of the final exam of the 18th-Century Literature course, the students of this course were asked to evaluate this task of letter writing and the reading material.⁸ 12 out of 13 students stated that they enjoyed the writing assignment, saying that they shared their feelings with an imaginary addressee. One student declared that she felt like an author and had the chance to communicate her feelings of entrapment with a fictional character. Another expressed that this assignment was like a therapy for him. They also wrote that the focus of the reading material, storytelling as a form of survival, increased their appreciation of literature during any crisis.

Other courses in the fall semester that stimulated student interaction through participation and assignments were the Concepts in Culture, which is offered to the second-year students, and the elective The Gothic. The premise of the Concepts in Culture course is to introduce to students a variety of critical approaches to texts – semiotic, sociological, cultural, psychoanalytic, literary, and so on. As the utilisation of these approaches requires a knowledge of terminology, the instructor of the course wanted the students to *show* their accumulation of the information rather than memorising definitions, which would have been the case in offline teaching. Therefore, a key assignment of the course was for the students each to choose a TV/web commercial broadcast at the time of the pandemic lockdown, and to do a cultural analysis of it. Incorporating many concepts that they learned during the lectures, the

students presented these analyses to their peers. Many of their comments during their presentations concentrated on the surreal quality of the times they were going through and the pathos used in some of the commercials to provoke emotional consumption. Another major reaction revealed in the presentations was their frustration at major companies seeking profit by exploiting consumers during the lockdown. The commercials analysed overwhelmingly made use of entrapped individuals at home by appealing directly to their psychological vulnerability. When asked during these class hours whether they found this assignment useful, the majority of the students answered that it particularly helped them understand the momentousness of the events they were going through, and that they developed a critical reading of cultural issues, and were able to relate this approach to their role as consumers.

In the elective course *The Gothic*, to provoke student interaction with each other at this time of intense isolation, the students were asked to shoot short Gothic films in groups of two or three. The academic purpose of the project was to give the students a chance to show their creativity while also exhibiting their knowledge and understanding of gothic elements studied in texts throughout the course. The resulting films were remarkable in their use of the isolation of the pandemic lockdown as a gothic element. A frequent motif of these films was the horror of external occurrences in the house while the protagonist is glued to a Zoom meeting screen at their computer or phone. For example, while chatting with a friend in a zoom meeting, there was a menacing figure behind one of the characters or one character was forced to watch an assault on the other character. Despite the technological hardships and time required to fulfill this task, the student response to the project was immensely positive. Based on comments during their presentation of their films in class, the students revealed that this project was a welcome relief and a pleasing opportunity to communicate their creativity at a time when they found the task of reading and writing on a screen exceedingly burdensome. The assignments in this and the previous course are not particular to online teaching, as similar tasks would have been given in the face-to-face course of education in which class participation is highly valued. However, the content of the assignments, which the students themselves directed towards the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, provided us with an opportunity for valuable discussion.

Conclusion

Online teaching at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, although greatly demanding because of the rapidity in which academics have been asked to shift to a different mode of presenting material, has also created the opportunity to re-evaluate systems of teaching both on and offline. As John Yandell asserts, since one aspect of education is socialisation (2020), online teaching during the pandemic has forced us to question the role of schools, 'that learning and development happen in and through the interactions that constitute the experience of schooling' (Yandell 2020, 263). Thus, as Bryson and Andres suggest, we tried to transform our role as instructors from teaching students to guiding them or coordinating all the relevant material and activities (2020) to increase student participation.

The results of both the course evaluations carried out by the university for each course at the end of every semester and the questionnaire prepared and conducted by the department to learn and analyse students' reactions to the adapted teaching methods and course materials in the period of the pandemic indicate that, though unexpected,

unplanned, and rapid, students also benefitted from the active involvement and participation in the teaching-learning process.⁹ The impact of creativity in the assignments, projects, exam questions on students' self-realisation and expression gave us the incentive to rethink our teaching and assessment methods. So, without doubt, this will change the course design in the future, whether the medium of instruction is face-to-face, online or a combination of the two. Thus, we believe when everybody is involved in the making of the class, there will be more to explore, experience, and enjoy.

Notes

1. For details see answers to questions 10, 12, and 15 in the survey (Appendix A) conducted by the department to evaluate online teaching at the end of the fall semester of 2020-2021.
2. This is the second issue of the newspaper prepared by the students of the English Literature and Cultural Studies Club. It is a special issue on the pandemic, including epigrams, letters to fictional characters and writers, diary entries and short essays on the pandemic. For details see Appendix B.
3. This is in reference to the earthquake that occurred on the 30th of September, 2020 in İzmir, Turkey.
4. See Appendix C.
5. See survey question 13 and Student A's answer in Appendix D.
6. For example, related to the *Epic of Gilgamesh* the quiz question was: What is the most attractive aspect/motif/theme of the story of Gilgamesh for you? What would you like to discuss in class? Explain why you find it interesting.
7. The characters the students addressed to in their letters were: Shahrazade and Dunyazade in *The Thousand and One Nights*, Gilgamesh, the friar in the first story of Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, the doctors in Turgenev and Kafka's stories, Mr. Nose in Gogol's story 'Nose', Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, the unnamed female character of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' Roderick in Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and Robert Langdon in Dan Brown's *Inferno*. The writers were Boccaccio and Shakespeare. See sample letters in Appendix B.
8. See Appendix D.
9. See survey questions 2 and 7 in Appendix A.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendices

Appendix A

Student Survey on Pandemic Period Evaluation: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1CAzCO9-uj3gsCg-_X7xnkHdZApobws7EimcX6VPndY/edit#responses

Appendix B

Special Issue of the Newspaper on the Pandemic Prepared by English Literature and Cultural Studies Club: <http://ell.cankaya.edu.tr/notice/bolum-topluluk-gazetesi-2021-pandemi-ozel-sayisi/>

Appendix C

Sample student responses to the bonus question asked in the final examination of 18th-Century Literature.

Student A:

To be honest, when I first saw this assignment, I thought it would not help me at all, and I even think that it would hurt myself more to remember bad events again, but on the contrary, it never actually happened. When I started writing I actually thought how much I really needed it and how good it was for me. Writing down what was going on in my head allowed me to see my feelings completely, and I even wanted to continue that. Writing made me think more positively and healthily, and it helped me to get through this pandemic period, even a little because I was not feeling mentally well. It was a really useful assignment for me, so I felt good to be given such an assignment. I wish I always had such assignments.

Student B:

Personally I really enjoyed the assignment; I think it was very relevant not only to the period we dealt with during the lectures but also the times we are living. It showed that as humanities students we are much more aware of the fact that history repeats itself and the written documents are always there to prove it. Like Pepys, we experienced a pandemic and many great fires all over the world. I never saw this assignment as just something to be completed because the more I wrote the more I realised that I needed an outlet to release all my feelings. I want to confess that I wrote many more entries than I included in the final text because I could not attend to therapy sessions due to COVID-19. Also, I will keep the diary as a document of the time I experienced, which is a historical event.

Student C:

During these difficult pandemic days, I started writing a diary for the first time since my childhood and realised that it was very good for me because it became a new occupation for me rather than sitting at home and studying or watching something. Also, I realised that I could joke under difficult conditions. Even while talking about my bad and difficult moments, I saw that I could combine it with a joke. Moreover, I put the diary in my friend's place without needing a person to talk around me. I think reflecting my lived experience enabled me to understand the value of moment even more. The reason for this was that I had the opportunity to review my day while I was writing and to see my inadequacies or what I did. Finally, I think it will be very useful in the future because this year has been a year that should never be forgotten for all of us. For all these reasons, I think it was a very beneficial assignment for me.

Appendix D

Sample student responses to the question asked in the final examination of World Literature.

Student A:

My friendships are melting like the snow and not in a positive way. The less we see each other the attachment between us gets loosened. Like Daru [in Camus 'The Guest'], we are all in an isolation and the worse thing is we are getting used to this. We get used to living in our sphere so much that if it goes like this, we may have no will to give chance to be friends with different people like the Arab in the story. In this period of the pandemic, reading and entering the minds of the characters in the fictional works and trying to be a writer, and transferring my feelings on a piece of paper gave me joy. I wrote my letter to a woman who has been suffering being inside and being suppressed like almost all characters that we've read and by finding the chance to talk to her I also feel that I communicated with all of the characters that I've read about.

Student B:

The letter was the most enjoyable assignment for me this term. I wrote to Dunyazade and finding similarities between me and her was very nice. To be honest, it made it a little bit easier to handle staying at home all the time, when I realised there was a character in a story and she was in the same situation with me. So, the course was very enjoyable and educational for me. It made the pandemic period less overwhelming.

Student C:

The reading materials for the World Literature course can be classified as ‘how to survive during the crisis’ and ‘search for identity’. Because of the COVID-19, the world is dealing with an unexpected crisis and we are trying to get used to it. So, since we read stories like *Gilgamesh*, and *The Decameron*, I can easily find certain common points with the characters. For instance, the people in *The Decameron* come together and tell stories to each other. It gave me a perfect idea during our lockdown and I started to share stories that I read in this course with my sister and brother. On the other hand, we wrote a letter to a fictional character. I wrote to Roderick Usher from *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and it was a unique experience for me. Just because we are living in a technology age, I had not written a letter before. Interestingly, I imagine that maybe I am a fictional character in a parallel universe and someone is reading my story and then he or she writes to another fictional character. Lastly, I enjoyed reflecting on my thoughts during the pandemic since after that virus ends, I can read them and remember what we lived through.