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FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION OF KAZAKHSTAN: CURRENT TRENDS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

The paper aims at analyzing the paradigms which influenced the development of Kazakhstan foreign language education, considers its trends and discusses the perspectives of its future development.

The analysis of modernization processes in the national foreign language education reveals the following changes: reconsideration of the language policy which aims at developing trilingualism, i.e. the knowledge of Kazakh, Russian, and English has acquired much significance in Kazakhstani society; elaboration of the Concept of foreign language education of Kazakhstan which is a distinct theoretical and methodological framework defining the main ways and strategies of its development; establishment of educational organizations offering advanced learning of foreign languages; transition from traditional to new forms of education, such as MA and PhD; introduction of new specialties within BA, MA and PhD programs.

Keywords

Kazakhstan, Foreign language, Education, Modernization, Trends, Perspectives

1. Introduction

At present the dynamic processes happening in the social life of Kazakhstan, new aims and new trends of society modernization predetermine the demand for a large number of citizens who master one or more foreign languages. In the realia of modern market economy

and information technology development the paramount importance is given to human resources as the main strategic aspect of social and economic advancement. Following this, foreign language education starts playing a significant role in the development of an individual as it fosters and expands his/her social and economic freedom.

The rising increase in demand for learning foreign languages can be explained by a number of factors. The processes of globalization stand first: since gaining its independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has been establishing social, cultural, economic, politic contacts with foreign countries around the world. The second reason is international integration in the sphere of education which results in broad cooperation of Kazakhstani educational institutions with foreign educational centers, the launching of new international projects, active participation of the teaching staff and students in various educational programs. Formation of a single educational space within the framework of the Bologna processes raised the question of reconsidering the previous system of education, foreign language education in particular, and led to its modernization. In order to meet the requirements of the world economy, business and science and take the leading positions in these spheres, the Kazakhstani system of education is still undergoing the process of modernization.

2. Research Questions

As it has been mentioned above, the education sphere of Kazakhstan is undergoing changes at an ever-increasing rate. There are appearing new forms of teaching and learning, new technologies, new educational programmes and materials which provide more teaching and learning opportunities and help make the educational process more effective.

To understand the development of the educational sector of the country, it becomes necessary to analyze the current trends, each one having its own specific features. This also may help shape the future development of the national system of education and predict its possible outcomes. The current paper gives a brief outline of the processes taking place in Kazakhstani foreign language education which quite recently has become a part of the global educational community.

In the center of attention are the following research questions:

- 1) What are the trends which can be currently observed in the sphere of foreign language education of Kazakhstan?
- 2) What are the main perspectives of its future development?

The research is based on the descriptive analysis generalizing the issues relevant for the current development of Kazakhstani educational sphere, which is identified as modernization of the national system of education.

3. Paradigms of Foreign Language Education in Kazakhstan

The system of foreign language education of Kazakhstan has its historically rich background going back to the Soviet system of education. Language policy of the USSR period proclaimed Russian not only as a dominant language, but also as a foundation for developing Soviet culture. Russian played an essential part in fostering agreement and harmony among nationalities living on the territory of the USSR. As Fierman (2005) observes, the official Soviet ideology aimed at “washing away” borders in linguistic, cultural and other differences among nationalities in the USSR which could eventually bring to their merger.

The situation took a recursive direction when Kazakhstan gained its independence. In 1991-1995, in order to carry out the purpose of integrating into the world economy, the educational system underwent substantial transformation. The language policy of the country was reconsidered, and multilingual education, including foreign language education, became the focus of increased attention. In those years, laws determining the new state of the native language, as well as ethnic and foreign languages, were much discussed and then adopted.

The key idea of the transformed foreign language education was accurately expressed by President Nazarbayev in his annual Speech in 2006. The President underlined then that the Republic of Kazakhstan must transform the system of education and become a highly educated country. The first step to be taken to reach the objective was the adoption of the new language policy which defined the status of the three languages - Kazakh, Russian, and English. Since then Kazakh is being developed as the state language, Russian is used as a means of international communication, and English helps the country integrate into the global community.

In 2011 there was adopted the state programme considering the use and development of languages; the period of the programme realization is 2011-2020. The programme follows the aim of preserving all the ethnic languages in Kazakhstan and ensuring the use of Kazakh as the state language (Baiteliyeva, 2015). These changes brought profound transformations in the pedagogical theory and educational practices, since they are aimed at the agreement of Kazakhstan and foreign language programs and the guarantee of convertibility of domestic higher education (Zharkynbekova& Nurtazina, 2012).

At the beginning of 1990s with the changes brought by new political and social tendencies English began to be accepted as one of the main tools of cognitive and professional activities for Kazakhstani citizens, particularly for its younger part, fresh

specialists. However, it was still early to introduce new forms and technologies of education such as information technologies, online and distance education, e-textbooks, since realization of these forms required a sufficient number of specialists who could fluently speak both the native and foreign languages. Bilingual professionals were much in need which resulted in the introduction of new specialties at the university level. One of such specialties which has become popular among Kazakhstani youth is “Foreign language: two foreign languages”, which develops basic foreign language skills in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages and trains specialists who will be able to use foreign language for academic and professional purposes. Within the mentioned specialty English is a mandatory foreign language to learn, the second foreign language is chosen by students themselves in accordance with their preferences and a range of language-learning options at a university.

Another step to promote new forms of education and to train specialists who will be able to realize educational process in foreign languages was the foundation of “Bolashak” international scholarship program. The programme which was launched in 1994 is considered to be a unique one; it helps the most talented people of Kazakhstan to get higher education at the leading universities around the world. Since 1994, more than 50,000 young people went abroad to receive their higher education. Furthermore, schools and universities demonstrated international activity which was reflected in implementation and development of new programs: academic mobility for teachers and students, exchange programs, Work and Travel, CCUSA. An additional impulse to modernization of foreign language education in Kazakhstan was given by international programs (Erasmus Mundus, TEMPUS, DAAD) as well as by new projects in collaboration with foreign organizations (British Council, US Embassy, Soros Fund).

The international mobility of professorial corps adds to modernization of the national system of education. As Ex-Minister of Education and Science Bakhytzhon Zhumagulov (Zhumagulov, 2012) underscored, international scholars take an active part in reconstruction of the system of education. Annually, more than 1,000 international experts are invited, and Kazakhstan education and science benefit from their recommendations and expertise. Furthermore, Kazakhstan supports a system of internships assisting home teachers and educators develop their professional skills at universities and educational institutions abroad. In 2006 the foreign language education of Kazakhstan developed a distinct theoretical and methodological framework, as the Concept of Foreign Language Education Development of Kazakhstan was devised at this time. The key principles of the Concept can be summed up as follows:

- The aim of the contemporary education is the development of a personality (anthropocentric approach);
- A basic psychological approach is activity approach;
- Foreign language education is based on competence approach, cognitive and communicative approaches being the leading ones;
- Teaching/ learning a foreign language is in close connection with teaching/learning culture of foreign language speakers.
- “Dialogue of cultures” is a pillar of contemporary foreign language education.

The principles of both the Concept and the Bologna Declaration have been actively implemented at the university level since 2010. In fact, the sequential development and modernization of foreign language education demonstrate substantial transformations. Taking into account international experience, the state curricula, syllabi, assessment system have been elaborated and implemented into practice.

Thus, the following conceptual paradigms of foreign language education of Kazakhstan can be identified:

- Reconsideration of languages status which was determined legislatively (Kazakh as the state language, Russian as the language for interethnic communication, and English as the language for international cooperation and integration);
- Acquisition of professional education based on competence approach;
- Establishment of educational hierarchy – schools, colleges, universities;
- Discontinuation of ex-USSR forms of post graduate and doctoral education and a full transition to the three-tier system of education (Bachelor's - Master's - Doctorate)
- Introduction of new specialties into the sphere of professional education due to the social demand.

3. Trends of Foreign Language Education in Kazakhstan

Currently the national model of foreign language education is concentrated around multilingual education which is supported by a number of national programs. In 2007 the “Triunity of languages” cultural project was adopted which aims at perseverance of integrity among ethnic groups of Kazakhstan and avoiding the dysfunction of the language environment of Kazakhstani society.

Another key document is the decree “On the strategic development of education system in the Republic of Kazakhstan for the years 2011-2020”. One of the main objectives of the programme is to implement the training of the multilingual teachers. To train the

teaching staff, the state compulsory education standard requires to increase the number of credits for learning foreign languages. By the year of 2020 the number of multilingual specialists teaching mathematics and natural sciences is expected to rise up to 15%. The State Program for the Development and Functioning of Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020 (2011) sets the key tasks which are reflected in the following table (see Figure 1):

Figure 1: Key tasks of the State Programme



The above mentioned principles are realized at the levels of secondary and high schools. Thus, a number of secondary schools for talented children which realize principles of renovated education were founded. Thirty-three schools teach in three languages such disciplines as mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics in the Republic today. At the university level there are launched programs in which English is the language of instruction in addition to Kazakh and Russian. Thus, 2.5 thousand special groups were created in 76 universities, in which 30 000 young people study all training areas in three languages. Furthermore, 50 universities of the Republic provide double-degree educational programs, which are carried out in collaboration with foreign partner universities.

The young generation of Kazakhstan approves of the language policy and believes that it will bring certain results in future. According to the data of the sociolinguistic survey among undergraduates and school learners conducted by Yeskeldiyeva & Tazhibayeva (2015), Kazakhstani young people support the course for the development of multilingual education set by the government: most students (67,6% of undergraduates and 63,7% of

school learners) expressed a wish to be taught in all the three languages. Furthermore, the research showed that Kazakhstani students are eager to learn English. 59, 4% of the students responded that it would not cause a great difficulty for them to be trained in English.

E-learning is another modern trend in foreign language education of Kazakhstan. As underscored by Bari et al. (2018), E-learning has influenced the system of education to the greatest extent introducing new forms of teaching and learning. “It has created new, and more flexible, approaches, more adaptable to the needs of the learners. New tools and technologies have improved knowledge storing methods and learning techniques” (Bari et al., 2018, p.102). Undoubtedly, E-learning when used as a complement to traditional forms of learning may be very effective and can help achieve the key objectives of the educational process (Gavaldon-Hernandez&Azqueta, 2017).

Dalayeva (2013) highlights the following tasks of E-learning at a university level of Kazakhstan:

- The development of own sites which can give consumers of educational services access to all the necessary information;
- The elaboration of electronic materials for students on various disciplines;
- The launching of electronic libraries providing access to various digital libraries;
- The development of distance learning;
- The setting up of electronic research laboratories.

Various forms of online language education arranged on the basis of modern platforms give the opportunity to study traditional aspects of a foreign language and provide online communication which only adds to the successful outcomes of foreign language teaching and learning. Furthermore, online foreign language education (out-of-class forms) and face-to-face classes are often combined: for example, lecture materials may be presented as audio or video, preparation for practical classes may involve additional search for the material, seminars demand reading in online libraries, examinations are held as online tests, or may be conducted as Skype discussions. Moreover, many universities provide students with access to digital training materials which are located on the websites of their own libraries. The Republican inter-high school electronic library (RIHSEL), which started functioning in 2009, offers access to various home and foreign electronic resources.

Another modern trend is a gradual shift to learning and teaching the languages of geopolitical neighbors and economic partners. According to the China Scholarship Council, the aim of which is to assist international students during their studies in China, the number of young people coming from Kazakhstan to China has increased five times in the past

decade. The statistics show that 12.000 Kazakhstani students currently study in China (Farchy, 2016). China has become quite fashionable in the last five years attracting thousands of Kazakhstani students with a high quality education. A number of universities offer to learn Chinese as a second foreign language within the framework of “Foreign language: two foreign languages” specialty (among which National University of Kazakhstan, Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages, L.N.Gumilyov Eurasian National University, the Eurasian Humanities Institute, Sh.Ualikhanov Kokshetau State University, etc.).

Contemporary demands to quality and forms of learning and teaching make pedagogical personnel of Kazakhstan seek to keep with modern aspects of foreign language teaching. It is no wonder that in 2012 National Center for Professional Development (NCPD) “Orleu” started functioning. Its main function is to provide pedagogical staff with a high quality professional development programs. NCPD “Orleu” cooperates with foreign educational institutions engaged in professional training of teachers. The National Center has been participating in the “E-learning for teachers of English” project, the main aim of which is to assist home teachers to develop their professional skills in the sphere of e-Learning; the project was supported by the British Council in Kazakhstan. In 2017 more than 2800 English teachers participated in professional development webinars; in 2018 there has been launched a program in the framework of which American teachers assist Kazakhstani teachers to improve their methods of teaching English in various regions of Kazakhstan.

New types of educational institutions are being established in the country. Their main aim is to combine advantages of the national education traditions with international experience. The teaching/ learning in such institutions is conducted in English, international experts and teachers are invited to train students. A significant example of a new type of educational institutions is Nazarbayev University, which has laid the foundation for the future development of the entire higher education sector of Kazakhstan. It seeks to create a systematic synthesis of education, science and innovation. Nazarbayev University has established international partnership with foreign universities - Singapore (National University of Singapore), the UK (Cambridge University and University College, London), and the USA (Carnegie Mellon University, Duke University, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Pittsburg Medical Center, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison).

Thus, the obvious trends of foreign language education in Kazakhstan are as follows:

- Successful integration of Kazakhstan into the world economic community reveals an obvious demand for specialists who will be able to communicate in foreign languages and to realize effective interaction on an intercultural level;

- Development of trilingual education predetermined by the language policy of the Republic;
- Increasing popularity of the Chinese language as China is a strategic partner of Kazakhstan
- Introduction of new foreign language specialties at a university level;
- Development of E-learning;
- Professional development of foreign language teachers;
- Establishment of educational institutions of a new type.

4. Perspectives of Foreign Language Education in Kazakhstan

Taking into account the analysis of the paradigms and modern trends of foreign language education of Kazakhstan it becomes possible to distinguish its main perspectives. The main question to answer in this part of the paper is: What trends Kazakhstan foreign language education will be oriented to in future?

First, it is multilingual education which will be actively developed with even more rigor both by educators and policy-makers. In future more multilingual schools will function in Kazakhstan as well as higher educational institutions will offer more multilingual specialties. This perspective is predetermined by one of the main aims of contemporary education of the Republic which is the formation of a specialist who will be able to realize interpersonal and intercultural communication on a high level.

Second which is the result of the first future perspective is the growing number of polylingual specialists who will be able to speak three-four foreign languages. Young generation take the learning of language seriously, they understand that the more foreign languages they know the more competitive they will be both in the local and international labor market.

Third is the development of E-learning as well as the spread of IT technology in education in Kazakhstan, which is, as a matter of fact, a worldwide tendency: e-learning forms of education have become popular due to the speedy development of information technologies. New information technologies offer a foreign language teacher a variety of resources for teaching materials, activities, types of presentation, forms of class work which can make a foreign language class even more interesting and entertaining for language learners. And as it is known, interesting and entertaining education fosters student motivation, which is one of the most important aspects of language learning.

Fourth is the growing development of the Chinese language. Chinese is the language of the geopolitical neighbor and partner of Kazakhstan. Following the rapid development of international relations, personnel and cultural exchanges between the two countries, the specialists knowing this language will be in high demand in local labor market.

5. Conclusion

Foreign language education of Kazakhstan has been undergoing the process of modernization due to contemporary economic and social realia. A significant attention in the country is given to developing language policy which is supported by the government. Trilingual policy lying at the core of the entire educational system of the country on the whole and the sphere of foreign language education in particular will assist Kazakhstani people, particularly its young generation, to become competitive both at home and global labor market, to get higher education at the leading universities of the world, to be flexible and mobile in social and professional spheres. Thus, to meet the needs of modern society, it has become of the greatest importance for Kazakhstani citizens to know three languages – Kazakh, Russian, and English.

Various issues of trilingual education have been actively discussed by home researchers, and still many issues are left behind offering educators and scholars much space for further studies. Among questions to be considered, the elaborating of special educational materials for trilingual specialties as well as the training teachers who will be able to conduct classes in three languages can be treated as essential priorities in the context of foreign language education of the Republic.

The main directions of the educational sector of Kazakhstan which is undergoing the process of modernization guarantee the intellectual and competitive potential of every citizen and synchronize with the global processes. New tasks which are set before the education system of the country are multilingual education, innovations, mobility of teachers and students, E-learning development. Furthermore, cooperation with foreign educational institutions, active participation in international programs and projects of the pedagogical staff provide a potential for the further development of the national system of foreign language education. As underscored by Zhumagulov (2015), the trends observed in contemporary education are “in many ways a kind of academic revolution, as they are unprecedented in their scale, diversity and dynamics” (p.9).

Limitation of the study

This is a small scale study generalizing the key trends which can be observed in the sphere of foreign language education of Kazakhstan and identifying the main perspectives of its future development. The issues describing the trends and perspectives constitute a basis for separate studies of Kazakhstani researchers.

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