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Trilingualism in Kazakhstan

Abstract

The State policy of the three of languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan suggests speaking three languages: Kazakh as a state language, Russian as a language of international communication and English as a language of successful integration into global economics. With more than 130 nationalities living in Kazakhstan, most of the population is bilingual (Kazakh and Russian). People's studying of English is motivated by the government programmes on the development at all stages of education. Introduction of trilingualism at the Universities provides opening English departments, systematic work on publishing and translation of University text-books into English and studying languages based on international standards.

All teachers who participated in the survey chose Kazakh as their mother tongue and 87.50% of them are bilingual. The survey results show that 75% of respondents consider themselves trilingual, whereas 25% of them are not sure whether their knowledge of one language matches the level of the others. According to the teachers, the most difficult matter in teaching subjects in English for them is using correct grammar and verb forms in their speech (50%); choosing appropriate methods of teaching (12.5%); finding and selecting necessary study materials (12.5%) and listening and speaking (12.5%). At the same time 12.5% of respondents have no difficulties at all in the process of teaching in English. The best way of improving English, as the teachers think, is reading books in English (37.5%). 25% of teachers suggest practicing English with a native speaker or improving the language skills abroad.

86.36% of students are bilingual and 65.91% of them are trilingual. All students (100%) responded that they like studying in English and 72.73% of them are satisfied with the process and level of teaching in English. 25% students see benefits in gaining and enhancing knowledge with the help of English, which helps them better communicate with foreign people (20.5%). 13.6% of students reported that studying in English is interesting, helpful and just a great experience being a wide source of information and first access to world literature (11.4%). Besides, knowledge of English opens an expanding perspective, opportunities for a future profession and makes it possible to develop into a qualified specialist (11.4%). 9.1% students surveyed that knowing English they can participate in academic exchanges, study medicine in foreign countries and work abroad. English is the key to confidence, self-popularization (6.8%) and enhanced mental activity (2.2%).

Teaching and studying in English is challenging for the teachers and students of the University yet offering new skills and opportunities in their career path.

Keywords: *multilingual education, trilingualism, trinity of languages, state policy.*

*"The borders of my language are the borders of my world."
– Ludwig Wittgenstein*

Introduction

Knowledge of languages extends the integration capability of countries and people as a language is a tool for communication and a bridge between cultures.

Multilingualism is widely spread in the multi-ethnic geographical space. 20 per cent of the population of the United States speak a language at home other than English, 56 per cent of Europeans are bilingual, and it is believed that over half of the entire world's population is bilingual [Trent, 2013].

As for Kazakhstan with more than 130 nationalities living there, the majority of Kazakhs speak two languages. Slavic people mainly speak only one language, whereas Uighur, Uzbek, Dungan, Turkish, Azerbaijani, Tajik, Tatar, and other ethnic groups are multilingual [Baiteliyeva].

The President of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev in his address to the nation of the Republic "New Kazakhstan in the New World" said that "Kazakhstan must be regarded as a highly-educated country all over the world, the population of which speaks three languages: Kazakh as a state language, Russian as a language of international communication and English as a language of successful integration into global economics".

The government's attention to the trio of languages motivates people's study of the English language. According to the Programme of development of the education system in the Republic of Kazakhstan during 2011 - 2020, changes are introduced to the education programmes of state compulsory education. Training of the teaching staff speaking three languages is carried out, and the number of credits for foreign languages in the cycle of basic classes is increased. A network of specialized Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools and Schools with Trilingual Education has been established in the country, in which Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology are taught in English.

According to the data provided by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the introduction of multilingualism in the Universities of the country has started since 2008. Universities can obtain institutional and specialized accreditation in three languages. The systematic work on publishing and translation of University text-books into the state language and English is being conducted. A level model of studying languages based on international standards is being introduced and language levels of students and teachers are being checked (IELTS, TOEFL).

Wkmosmu experience

West Kazakhstan Marat Ospanov State Medical University has formed academic groups of local students studying in the English Language, all subjects of which are taught in English. At the moment over 50 Kazakh students are studying medicine in English at the University. In addition, starting from 2015 groups of students from India are educated at the University and their number has reached 150 this year. Most of the Kazakh students speak both Kazakh and Russian, Indian students – their province dialect and Hindi.

Aiming at implementing the study programme in English at the University a group of teachers was formed who improved their level of the English language for teaching in English. Teaching medical and other subjects in English is challenging for the teachers of the University yet rewarding as they acquire new skills and opportunities along their career path.

Teachers of West Kazakhstan Marat Ospanov State Medical University are actively taking English courses offered by the University. In addition they are sent to English Summer schools to master English with native speakers.

There is an opportunity for the students of all levels, teachers and staff of the University to participate in International Credit Mobility programmes (academic mobility) in order to broaden their knowledge, acquire key skills, develop professionally, practice the English language and deepen their understanding of other cultures. The main partners of the University are Poznan University of Medical Sciences, Poland; University of L'Aquila, Italy; Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, Lithuania. Besides these Universities our students and teachers can share experience with more than 40 other foreign higher educational institutions of Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Latvia, Slovenia, Italy, Germany, etc.

STUDY DESIGN

Therefore, in an effort to better understand the students' and teachers' thoughts toward implementation of education programmes in English into the University study process and trilingualism, the survey was conducted at West Kazakhstan Marat Ospanov State Medical University in December 2017.

The study gathered opinions of students and teachers about education in English at the University, the trio of languages and related issues.

148 Indian students and 53 Kazakh students studying at the faculty of General Medicine and 24 teachers of the English programme participated in the survey.

The respondents received 5 questions to which they had to provide reactions. The following questions were given to the teachers:

1. What is your mother tongue?
2. Do you consider yourself bilingual?
3. Do you consider yourself trilingual?
4. What is the most difficult matter in teaching subjects in English?
5. How do you improve your level of English?

Students were offered the questions:

1. What is your mother tongue?
2. Do you consider yourself bilingual?
3. Do you consider yourself trilingual?
4. Do you like studying in English?
5. Are you satisfied with the level of teaching subjects in English?

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

All teachers participated in the survey have chosen Kazakh as their mother tongue and 87.50% of them are bilingual. Survey results show that 75% of respondents consider themselves trilingual, whereas 25% of them are not sure whether their knowledge of one language matches the level of the others.

According to the teachers, the most difficult matter in teaching subjects in English for them is using correct grammar and verb forms in their speech (50%), choosing appropriate methods of teaching (12.5%), finding and selecting necessary study materials (12.5%) and listening and speaking (12.5%). At the same time 12.5% of respondents have no difficulties at all in the process of teaching in English.

The best way of improving English, so the teachers think, is reading books in English (37.5%). 25% of teachers suggest practicing English with a native speaker or improving the language skills abroad. Other ways of improving English are working with research papers (19.5%), doing grammar tests (8.5%) and listening to conversations (5.5%). 4% of teachers responded that they will always study English.

Among students 86.36% of respondents are bilingual, of which 65.91% are trilingual. All students (100%) responded that they like studying in English and 72.73% of them are satisfied with the process and level of teaching in English.

All students participating in the survey see benefits in studying medicine in English. The most important for them is that knowing three languages nowadays opens new opportunities for them.

Table 1. Benefits of studying in English for students

No.	Benefits	%
1	Increased activity of brain.	2.2
2	Knowledge gain, enhancing of knowledge, better education, new horizons.	25
3	Wide source of information, primary access to world literature.	11.4

4	Better understanding and communication with foreign people, cultures and backgrounds, sharing experience.	20.5
5	Confidence and self-popularization.	6.8
6	It's interesting to learn, helpful and a great experience.	13.6
7	Academic exchange, studying medicine in foreign countries, working abroad.	9.1
8	Expanding perspective, opportunities in future profession, developing into qualified specialist.	11.4

As it is seen from the Table, 25% of students see benefits in gaining and enhancing knowledge with the help of English, which also helps them better understand and communicate with foreign people, cultures and backgrounds (20.5%). 13.6% students reported that studying in English is interesting, helpful and just a great experience. It provides a wide source of information and first access to world literature (11.4%). Besides, knowledge of English opens an expanding perspective, opportunities in their future profession and makes it possible to develop into a qualified specialist (11.4%). 9.1% of students surveyed wrote that by knowing English they can participate in academic exchanges, study medicine in foreign countries and work abroad. English is the key to confidence, self-popularization (6.8%) and activity of brain (2.2%).

CONCLUSION

This research has served as an attempt to study the existing practices of studying in English at West Kazakhstan Marat Ospanov State Medical University and to design further activities to promote and practice trilingualism.

Understanding the importance of knowing three languages, we agree that trilingualism is a need of the globalizing world. We claim that the trio of languages is strategically significant for the Republic of Kazakhstan. Trilingualism as the state language policy is highly important for the needs of our society. Knowing three languages would prepare youth for their future professions, and enhance their social experiences.

For the teachers, studying English opens the door to international science, since English has become its universal language. Academic staff can gain access to the vast scientific literature and can communicate with other scientists anywhere in the world. So, implementing trilingualism in Kazakhstan may be a challenge, but it is the challenge worth pursuing.

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