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MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AT KSU THROUGH THE EYES OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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Abstract

Multilingual education has been a part of Kazakhstan state educational policy for over a decade. Special grants for developing and implementing university multilingual programs have been put in place. The article presents a study made at Kokshetau State University about the way such multilingual programs have been operating so far according to students and teachers participating in them. The study searched for answers to the following two research questions: what is the current state of multilingual programs at the university and how students and teachers evaluate such programs. Students in second and third year of study and teachers in multilingual programs participated in the study. The main research findings indicate that the multilingual programs at Kokshetau State University are viewed positively by both students and teachers and that they provide sufficient support which ensures the development of multilingual skills in different professional fields. These programs employ a variety of interactive teaching methods and provide stimulus for students to interact with the literature in foreign languages in different academic fields which allows students learn and interact using three languages of study. Student-teachers relationships are positive and create an open and motivating environment for learning through open communication in a multilingual educational setting. Both students and teachers recognize the importance of language skills and the opportunities such programs provide for their future personal and professional development.

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Keywords: Multilingualism; multilingual university education; multilingual skills and professional future



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1. Introduction

Over the past five years a greater focus has been placed upon the development of multilingual education and the preparation of multilingual professionals in Kazakhstan. Since 2012 Kokshetau State University is on the list of the universities that are implementing the pilot project for preparing multilingual teachers. This process is quite complex and long as students started their programs in the Russian language. In 206/2017 academic year the Ministry of Education of Republic of Kazakhstan awarded the Kokshetau State University financial grant for 42 students enrolled in a pre-university foundation course (27 students – in a group with the Kazakh language and 17 students – in a group with the Russian language). This academic year these students have been intensively studying English, Kazakh/Russian, the history of Kazakhstan, specialised subjects (physics, math, chemistry, biology) depending on their professional profile. At the end of the year these students will have an attestation exam that will include a test, comprising of three compulsory subjects (math, language, Kazakhstan history): for each of these subjects there will be 20 closed questions with one right answer out of 5 possible choices. There also will be 2 profile subjects (depending of their specialty) – math and physics; math and geography; biology and chemistry; foreign language and history; language of study and history; geography and foreign language; chemistry and physics; history and humans; society, law – practical exam. For each of these subjects there will be 20 questions with 2 right answers out of 5 possible (maximum 2 points per question). Maximum score is 140 and the lowest passing score is 50. After successfully passing this exam students must take the Common national test (for those who want to study at University), which also includes 3 compulsory subjects and 2 profile subjects depending on their chosen field of study.

Every university that was included in the pilot project developed independently its educational program. Special work regarding language education and preparation of students and teachers was implemented and is still going on. For the past 4 years more than 50 university teachers went to obligatory specializations (between half to three years) by visiting and staying at leading foreign universities, for example 14 teachers were trained in mathematical subjects and science within the “Bolashak” program and 7 persons were trained within the Erasmus Mundus program, 4 people participated in other programs. Intensive language courses are offered to the students so they could develop their language potential.

During the implementation of this program the following proportion has been developed: 50% of all the subjects are thought in the original language of education. This means that in the group with Kazakh as their native language 50% of the subjects are taught in Kazakh, 20% are taught in Russian and 30% are taught in English. At present, multilingual education at Kokshetau State University is performed through 17 specialisations at a Bachelor level as well as at a Master level.

In October and November 2016 a monitoring study among students and teachers in these specialisations was conducted at the University. The article presents the results of this study which included students in second and third year, studying in Multilanguage groups.

2. Problem Statement

The development of the global world increased the significance of promoting multilingualism. Up until recently the most common form of multilingualism was related to studying both mother and foreign language, and in Europe it also incorporated the use of mother, national/regional and foreign language. According to UNESCO and a number of scientists Sharifian (2013), Trudel (2014), Wang and Kirkpatrick (2015) the ability to use all these languages is an important factor of inclusive and quality education (Multilingualism: a key to inclusive education, UNESCO). Various researches for the past several years show that the spread of multilingualism across the globe is a logical process, which has its roots in some significant changes in economy, politics, culture and education (Iskandirova, 2016). More and more popular brands (clothes, cars, kitchen appliances, etc.) move their production lines in the third world countries with a much cheaper work force and still manage to maintain the quality of their products. The number of migrating people is going up, which naturally creates a necessity for them to be able to speak at least three languages – their native language, the official language of the country they live and work at, and at least one international language. It was in 1995 that the European Commission published an official report on education in which there is a target set for acquiring a three-language ability for all European citizens. A similar issue has been discussed in the Commission of European common society in 2007 and the EC provides regular financial grants for researches in the field of multilingualism (<https://articlekz.com/article/11917>).

In Kazakhstan the notion of multilingualism was first introduced by N. Nazarbaev in 2004. In 2006 during the XII session of Assembly of nations in Kazakhstan president Nazarbaev once more stated that the ability to speak at least three languages is of a vital importance for children. In 2007 in his official Message (Новый Казахстан в новом мире) N. Nazarbaev presented his proposal for the implementation of the cultural project “Language triple-unity”.

Following these developments, multilingual education in Kazakhstan has been set in several legislative documents: Constitution of Republic of Kazakhstan, Law “For languages”, Law “For education”, A concept for development of foreign language education in Republic of Kazakhstan.

Considering the present relevance of multilingual education and the developments of such programs in Kokshetau State University for the past several years, it is important to see how those programs have been accepted by both students and university teachers and to what extend education in them has been valued as useful.

3. Research Questions

Main research question for the study were set as follows:

- What is the current state of multilingual education programs in Kokshetau State University according to students and teachers who participate in them?
- What are the attitudes of students and teachers toward the possibilities of multilingual education programs to provide opportunities for their future personal and professional development?

Answering those question will provide a fair picture of the way multilingual education programs have been accepted within the university community, the way they have been operating so far and will

reveal the extent to which they have been seen as useful among University main stakeholders – its students and its academic staff.

4. Purpose of the Study

As the study is focused upon multilingual education programs and their participants and beneficiaries, it aims to reveal the opinion of students and teachers in those programs about the current state of the programs, the way they have been working so far and the opportunities they (can) provide for a future professional and personal development.

This defines the main purpose of the study as gathering relevant data about the multilingual education programs at Kokshetau State University and the way students and teachers see those programs' current state and possible future development.

5. Research Methods

Two target groups were chosen to participate in this study – students who are going through multilingual education programs and who are in their second and third year, and university teachers who deliver the education. The main reason for this choice of respondent groups is that study purpose – to gather relevant information about the state and future of the programs – defines the need to get the data from people who actually experience them and who can give a relevant and inside information about how the programs operate so far.

Considering the specifics of the respondent groups, the study purpose and research questions, using a monitoring study (Farman) is the most suitable type of research approach.

Special questionnaires were developed for both respondent groups – students and teachers. Both questionnaires include similar questions (when possible) which allows for a comparison between the opinions and perceptions of the chosen respondent groups. Questions aim at gathering data on several main variables:

5.1. Variable 1: Education process in multilingual programs and its main characteristics.

This variable refers to some of the basic characteristics of the educational process within the multilingual programs which includes: use of interactive teaching methods; use of various educational means; stimulus for students to read new, contemporary publications in English, related to their academic subject; developing qualities and skills among students for lifelong learning and for future integration in labour market.

Considering the research question regarding the current state of the multilingual education program, studying and understanding the way those programs have been working so far is of a significant importance. As the main purpose of each education program is to provide its students with a quality knowledge and competencies, and useful and transferable skills in a most efficient way, the main focus of this variable is to reveal to what extent students and teachers think that the education is up-to-date and supports the development of useful skills and abilities in multilingual setting, rather to gather information about the academic content and operational parameters of the programs themselves.

5.2. Variable 2: Quality and character of interactions between relevant stakeholders in multilingual programs.

The second variable is relevant to an issue quite important for multilingual education itself – the basic characteristics of the relationships between the relevant participants in the educational process and other support staff. The variable refers to: the type of relationships among students; relationships between students and teachers inside and outside the educational process; between students and administrative staff and between students and teaching and laboratory assistants.

All those types of relationships are considered really important so the education can go in a smooth and effective way. Being in an environment which makes ones feel comfortable and accepted, gives the students the confidence to express themselves both professional and personal in their mother language, the other official state language and international language (Russian, Kazakh and English languages).

5.3. Variable 3: Opportunities which multilingual education programs provide for a better professional and personal development in the future.

Students' and teachers' perception about future prospects provided by multilingual education programs are quite essential. This variable refers to parameters like: students' motivation to choose multilingual education program and the importance they attribute to the ability to speak several different language for their future professional development. Teachers' perceptions of those prospects are also important as they influence their motivation to improve the educational process, to provide quality teaching and to stimulate quality learning.

Respondents' opinions and perceptions regarding the above set variables will describe an actual picture of the present state of multilingual education programs in Kokshetau State University and will provide insights for their implementation so far and for their future development.

A total of 141 students and 15 teachers participated in the research. Students were in their second or third year of study. 71.63% of students and 66.67% of teachers are female and, respectively, 28.34% of students and 33.33% of participating teachers are male.

6. Findings

The research showed that multilingual education programs are evaluated in positive terms by most students and teachers. The programs incorporated interactive teaching methods and a various instructional means, suitable for students' needs. They also provided a beneficial multilingual environment, and teachers stimulated students to develop their language potential and abilities. Relationships among students and between students and teachers and other members of university community are mostly benevolent both inside and outside of classrooms as reported by both researched groups. Most students and teachers believe that multilingual education programs enhance their chances for personal and professional development. Most of respondents' recommendation regarding future improvement of the programs are related to providing more differentiated language courses which will improve students' and teachers' language abilities and will benefit quality of multilingual education as a whole.

The following paragraphs presents some of the research findings regarding each of the research variables in more details

6.1. Education process in multilingual programs and its main characteristics.

In modern informational society the ability to gain up-to-date and relevant knowledge and to acquire practical skills which can be used in future professional work are essential. This demands the education to be more and more flexible and to incorporate both interactive teaching methods (discussions, role plays, debates) and various instructional means and tools, especially different ICT-tools so students can develop their critical thinking and to update their computer literacy.

The research showed that 92.9% of all students in multilingual programs think that their teachers use interactive teaching methods to a suitable extent. In addition to that, 84.4% of students stated, that ICT- teaching tools are well-incorporated in their classes. Only 13.3% of teachers show some critique toward themselves and said that they don't use regularly such tools in their lectures and seminars. These data clearly show that education process in multilingual programs is considered well-developed when it comes to incorporating interactive teaching methods and various technical and ICT instructional tools.

Stimulating students to read relevant and modern academic and professional literature in English in their field of study is quite important since this provides additional practice in the international language. The study showed that 75.9% of all students feel that they have been stimulated by their teacher to read professional publications in English on a regular basis. Although this is like $\frac{3}{4}$ of all researched students, it is important to note that in the future some additional measures should be considered so this figures goes up and multilingual programs can make even more of their students feel stimulated to benefit from interacting with academic material in English. In the meantime teachers evaluate more critically their work in this area. Some 53.4% of them believe that they stimulate their students to read such material to the needed extent. These results can be considered within the norm as usually teachers have high standards when it comes to their professional work and constantly search for better ways to do "more" for their students. Reading professional literature in English and other two language raises both language and professional competences of students since they get acquainted with different point of views from the perspectives of different theoretical and cultural concepts.

Creating a beneficial multilingual environment is essential for achieving the goals of multilingual programs. Such an environment includes stimulus and options for developing students' and teachers' language abilities and potential, and providing additional courses in any of the language used in the program in accordance with students' needs. The study showed that 80.8% of researched students think that their teachers always try to develop their language abilities. For 14.9% of them this happens only from time to time and for 2.1% - never. In comparison – 73.3% of teachers believe that they always try to develop their students' language abilities in all the program languages. When it comes to options for students to acquire additional support for their language and professional competencies, the study showed that 56.4% of students think that they have such options through special courses in their academic subject or any of the three languages. This figure, although a little over 50%, can still be considered not suitable enough for the purposes of multilingual program. This shows that more efforts should be put in providing additional courses, especially in different language. The research clearly showed that additional language

courses are needed and that they should be directly related to students language needs. 68.1% of all students stated that they receive additional support in studying foreign language (English) and only 49.6% - in studying Russian or Kazakh language. This results makes it clear that there is a general assumption that all students have similar and good level of understanding of both official languages, which is actually not the case. Some of them may have studied in Russian schools or have Russian language as a mother language spoken at home and this impairs their abilities in Kazakh language and vice versa. So additional courses in both official state languages should be provided especially for students in multilingual programs where acquiring multilingual abilities are one of the educational goals.

When it comes to evaluating the current state of multilingual education programs it is interesting to see to what extent students think they have been stimulated by their teachers to develop different social and interpersonal skills that will be useful in their future social integration. The study showed that most of the students believe that teachers do their best to develop such skills within student-teacher interaction. 89.3% of students stated that teachers develop respect toward others and 96.5% - that teachers develop responsibility in their students. When it comes to motivation for studying the chosen subjects, 83.9% of students feel that their teachers often and on a regular basis try to develop such motivation and 86.4% think that they have been stimulated to be initiative during classes.

The summary of data gathered regarding *variable 1. Educational process and its main components* shows that as for now *students and teachers think in mostly positive terms about some of its main components*. The education in the programs incorporates enough interactive teaching methods and technical means so it can support the development of students in both language and professional aspect. Most of the students feel supported to develop their language skills by reading academic literature in English and in the other two languages. They also believe that teachers try to develop different social and interpersonal skills like responsibility, respect toward others and initiative.

6.2. Quality and character of interactions between relevant stakeholders in multilingual programs.

Quality and character of interactions between relevant stakeholders in multilingual programs is really important for both students and teachers. University mission is to develop young people to their full potential, to be a cultural and a research centre which attracts young minds and which receives support from its alumni. University and university education, as carriers of traditions and innovations should stimulate creativity and expression of students and teachers and this requires a positive, stimulating social-psychological climate. The study tried to reveal the nature of relationships among students and between students and teachers both inside and outside classroom interaction along with the relationships with other relevant stakeholders that can influence the educational environment – teaching and lab assistants and administrative staff.

80.9% of researched students believe that relationships among students in multilingual programs are more benevolent than not and speak about them in positive terms. This opinion is supported by all teachers participating in the research. Study results also showed that 96.4% of all students feel that their relationships with teachers within the educational process are really good-willed. Within teachers group

66.7% believe that these relationships are positive as a whole and the rest evaluate them as more positive than negative in their character.

Similar results appeared when it comes to the relationship between students and teachers outside of classroom interaction which shows that those two groups communicate freely at different levels. Such open and positive interaction is essential for creating a stimulating and motivational environment for education where students can freely express themselves in different languages. Studying in a multilingual programs adds a different layer to education which concerns the acquisition of proper language skills along with the formal subject preparation. This additional layer is highly dependable of students' comfort to speak and interact with others in language different than their native one so the character of relationships within and outside classroom is of a great importance.

Study also showed that relationships between students and other relevant stakeholders are mostly benevolent and positive. 89.3% of students stated that relationships between them and program administrative staff are mostly positive which opinion is also supported by all the teachers. When it comes to interaction with teaching and lab assistants 92.9% of students consider them mostly benevolent than not and again teachers support such point of view.

When data gathered on *variable 2 - Quality and character of interactions between relevant stakeholders in multilingual programs* is summarized, it can be said that those relationships are considered by both researched groups to be mostly positive. Such relationships can support the achievement of one of main educational aims - developing language and interpersonal skills among students. Feeling comfortable and studying in a benevolent environment makes students more open to communication in different languages and on different levels with different groups – other students, teachers, teaching and lab assistants. Positive relationships can also enhance motivation to learn and to benefit to a full extent from what multilingual programs can provide for their students.

6.3. Opportunities which multilingual education programs provide for a better professional and personal development in the future.

The third variable reflects the way students feel about the opportunities multilingual education programs provide for their future personal and professional development. This includes their motivation to choose such a program for their university education and the prospects they believe they have when they have good abilities in different languages.

Study results revealed that some of the main motivation factors for choosing a multilingual program refers to students' wishes for future professional and personal development and its relation to multilingual abilities and especially to speaking English. A significant part of researched students (84.9%) stated that part of their motivation to choose a multilingual program is their wish to further study in a Master's degree where English language will be needed. In addition to that, 81.8% of them motivated their choice with the understanding that they could not become good professionals in the future if they don't speak English language. 68.4% pointed out that their motivation also included a wish to start working for an international company in the future which also requires a good knowledge of English. Such motivation factors add up to the fact, that only 50% of students said that their good level in English motivated them to participate in the multilingual program, while 84.9% of them were stimulated to join the program by their good level of Russian or Kazakh language as their not native language. Those results

clearly show that students are motivated to choose multilingual program mostly because they expect to improve their English language skills as such skills will be needed for their future plans (educational or professional). In the meantime they rely on their knowledge of Russian and Kazakh as a second language and feel comfortable with the fact that the program provides education in those language although, as showed above, some of them need additional support to improve their skills in these fields.

Choosing a university multilingual program is related to students' personal believes about the prospect such a program can provide for their future personal and professional development, especially when it comes to multilingual knowledge and skills. Study results clearly show that most of the students (96.4%) believe that English language abilities will support their success in their chosen professional field. In addition to that, 95.7% said, that being able to speak English will support their personal and professional development and 94.3% believe that speaking both Kazakh and Russian languages will do the same. These opinions are supported by the opinions of teachers to the same extent.

The summarization of data gathered on *variable 3 - Opportunities which multilingual education programs provide for a better professional and personal development* in the future, leads to the conclusion, that *students choose such type of program mainly because they see it as a primary mean to improve their English abilities, which they don't see as good enough for their future plans* – education and professional integration. Their skills in both official languages in the country they see as a possible motivation to join a multilingual program as it will also provide additional benefits in this field. Students evaluate knowledge in all three program languages as really important for their future professional and personal development and this is in compliance with national and university goals in multilingual education.

7. Conclusion

The study of multilingual programs in Kokshetau State University revealed some important information regarding their current state and the way students and teachers feel about them. Data gathered on main research variables gives enough information upon which the research question can receive their answers.

Research question one: What is the current state of the programs for multilingual education in Kokshetau State University according to students and teachers who participate in them?

The answer of this question contains in the data gathered within variables one and two. Based on the research findings it can be said that multilingual program provide education that is oriented toward the development of a different range of skills, among which of a primary interest are language skills. Regular use of interactive teaching methods, combined with various technical tools support active participation of students in education and stimulates their interaction among each other so language abilities can be improved and can also be related to a proper modern computer literacy. Teachers put enough effort in stimulating reading relevant academic literature in English and in other two languages so students can interact with original sources of information in different languages and in the same time, be exposed to different theoretical perspectives, developed in different cultural and scientific conditions. Along with language skills multilingual programs develop transferable skills like responsibility, respect in interpersonal communication and initiative. Positive relationships among program's stakeholders support

the creation of a positive, open and stimulating environment in which all students can speak freely without being afraid that they will be negatively judged because of their language abilities. This strongly supports the development of those abilities and also creates positive motivation for studying the chosen academic specialty and subjects.

As a primary conclusion it can be said that multilingual programs are so far operating at a good level according to students and teachers and that their main educational goal – to prepare multilingual professionals in different field can be achieved properly in the future.

Research question two: What are the attitudes of students and teachers toward the possibilities of multilingual education programs to provide opportunities for their future personal and professional development?

The answer of this research question comes from the data gathered on variable 3. There are enough grounds to say that students are motivated to study in a multilingual program because they understand the importance of speaking multiple languages for their professional and personal development. A primary motivation for such a choice is the need to improve their English language as it is seen as ultimately vital for their educational and professional plans. Still, all three languages (English, Kazakh and Russian) are considered important by the students for their future successful professional integration.

In conclusion some recommendation from students and teachers for improving multilingual programs can be added. Most of the teachers (88.6%) feel that they should have more opportunities to raise their professional qualifications, especially regarding their skills and abilities in English language. They also stated that it would be really beneficial for them to study Russian and English language in a comparative perspective and also to participate in practical courses with tutors coming from a native English environment. Students also referred to additional language courses, developed for their individual needs, as a good way to improve multilingual programs. Other relevant measures for improvement of multilingual programs both groups pointed out include: test of English language level at the beginning of education and providing a “preparation” year of study so those abilities can be boosted before students start learning their chosen academic subjects; providing native English speakers as teachers and tutors in English language classes; developing students’ mobility in English language, preferably in countries where English is official language or is the main language of academic study and research; raising the number of classes in language courses and providing more relevant academic literature in English in different academic fields and subjects.

As a main summary of the study it can be concluded that in Kokshetau State University multilingual education has so far been implemented according to state and university goals and mission in the field. Such programs will be developed and improved in future as participating students and teachers clearly recognize their value and significance. The University puts a lot of efforts to support multilingual education and even set multilingual education in its strategic goals and plans. The study presented here is just the first step toward researching and ensuring quality of University multilingual programs and hopefully it will be followed by more research in the field at university and in national level.

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