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## Foreign Language Education in Kazakhstan: Paradigms and Trends

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### Abstract

*Paradigms* (1991-2011). The analysis on gradual modernization of foreign language education (FLE) in Kazakhstan has revealed the following changes: legislative determination of languages status (Kazakh, Russian and English); establishment of educational organizations of various levels with advanced learning of foreign languages as well as with a chance of acquiring professional education and experience for both learners and teachers; refusal from some traditional and introducing new forms of education (MA and PhD); introducing new specialties within BA, MA and PhD levels; transmission of Professional Qualification Institutes (PQI) into CPD National Centre for pedagogical staff. *Trends* (2011-2015). The obvious trends of FLE are successful world economic integration of the Republic, which demands learning language-leaders; increasing popularity of Chinese language and decreasing popularity of some European languages; multi-linguism of young professionals and natural bilinguism of KZ young generations; early FL learning at pre-school and primary school levels; wide use of blended learning forms and IT technologies; active development of additional language education for all ages and abilities; establishment of new type organizations emphasizing advantages of national education system and world research practice. Conclusions and Recommendations. The most important paradigm in foreign language education (1991-2015) is its aiming at intercultural communication, i.e. transformation from learning 'language in theory' to 'language in practice'. In fact, this fact-invisible paradigm has led to overall FLE system modernization. Modern trends are to be taken into account for further developing of Kazakhstan foreign language education system.

Keywords: foreign language education; paradigms; trends.

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## 1. Introduction

In Kazakhstan, the development of foreign language education keeps up with political, economic, social, cultural priorities. These priorities of independent Kazakhstan are mostly determined by a tendency to correspond to international standards under the conditions of new economic, social and political reality. The problems, which the humanity has encountered in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, raise the question of modernizing the previous system of education, foreign language education in particular, in order to meet the requirements of the world science, economy and business. Thus, aspiring to get the leading positions in these spheres, the Kazakhstani system of education has survived and is still undertaking the modernization process. This article is aimed at analyzing the paradigms and trends of foreign language education in Kazakhstan.

## 2. Paradigms of Foreign Language Education in Kazakhstan

The system of foreign language learning has its long historical and cultural traditions in Kazakhstan. In 1991-1995, the educational system encountered the necessity of substantial transformation in order to carry out the purpose of integrating our country into the world economic community; the purpose was designated by the President Nursultan Nazarbaev. Multilingual education, including foreign language learning, became the subject of increased attention for our society: 1) laws about languages and their new state were discussed and laid down; 2) status and context of learning foreign languages (mainly, English) were mentally, socially and legislatively changed. Subsequently the key idea of the modernized foreign language learning and teaching was capaciously and accurately expressed by President N. Nazarbayev in his annual Speech-2006:

Kazakhstan must be understood and accepted by the world community as a highly educated country, whose population uses three languages: Kazakh is the state language, Russian is the language of international communication, and English is the language of successful integration into the global economy.

In this connection, there have occurred deep transformations "in the pedagogical theory and educational practice, since these changes are aimed at the agreement of Kazakhstan and foreign educational programs ... and the guarantee of convertibility of domestic higher education" (Zharkynbekova & Nurtazina, 2012). At the beginning of the 1990s English was widely understood as one of the main tools of the cognitive and professional activity for fresh specialists. Based on my own life and professional experience I can assert that learning English has become an imperious want. It was rather difficult to obtain a wide and valuable access to global information sources in the Internet without any knowledge of this language.

However, at that period it was too early to speak about any new forms of education (information technologies, e-textbooks, online learning and teaching), since these forms required a sufficient number of bilingual professionals who could be able to speak both native and foreign languages fluently. Realizing the necessity of promoting these forms of education, Kazakhstan actively developed the policy of overall education. The idea of the President to found the targeted international scholarship program *Bolashak* was innovative and unique. Implemented in 1993 it aimed at enabling the most gifted human resources with western education for further developing the priority sectors of Kazakhstan economy. JSC Center for International Programs state that the selected candidates were able to get the best education at the best world universities by means of PhD and MA education programs as well as by participating in overseas research internships ("History of the Program", 2015).

This stormy integration process in the foreign language education was accompanied by international activity of schools and universities in:

- academic mobility for students and school teachers / university professors;
- student exchange programs for a semester / academic year;

- CCUSA, Work and Travel youth programs;
- participation of education managers and officials in different international educational programs;
- projects by foreign organizations (e.g. British Council, USA Embassy, Soros Fund).

It should be stressed these international contacts were mostly connected with the USA, Great Britain and a number of European countries (Germany, France, etc.).

Thus, learning English, French, German and other world-spread languages under the rapidly changing economic and socio-cultural conditions became a vital need for university curricula and academic exchange agreement.

The Kazakh-Turkish male schools, first founded in Kazakhstan in 1992, represented an exponential example of multilingual education, where English, Turkish, Kazakh and Russian were taught alongside with teaching other disciplines in a foreign (English / Turkish) language (Akbalayeva, 2014). That approach to multilingual education in Kazakh, Russian and English or Turkish, when a foreign language (*on a par with* a native one) carried out "the function of obtaining professional or self-education knowledge, as a key aspect of intercultural communication and poly-cultural upbringing" (Makayev, 1999).

In the middle of 2000s a number of foreign languages was included into the List of mandatory disciplines. Sagima S. Kunanbaeva headed the research group for devising "*Concept of Foreign Language Education Development for Kazakhstan*" (FLED for short, 2006). The key idea of the Concept is "...represented as a level model, which ensures unity, succession and continuity for all steps of the education system. The system-level approach contributes to output into the world education and information space" (Concept, 2006). The most important theoretical and methodological aspects of this Concept are as follows:

- 1) Contemporary education aimed at creating a personality;
- 2) Activity approach as a basic psychological concept for contemporary education;
- 3) Cognitive, communicative and competence approaches;
- 4) Inter-language hypothetical model for foreign language learning;
- 5) Idea about 'dialogue of cultures'.

The state standard for foreign language competence was worked out; later it was represented in "*Education Concept for Foreign Languages Learning at Primary and High Schools*". Let us recall the *Bologna Declaration for European Higher Education Area*, which Kazakhstan accepted in 2010 as the first Central Asia country. The Declaration principles have been actively implemented at the university level since 2010.

In fact, these 20 years of sequential development and modernization of foreign language education (*de bene esse* from 1991 to 2011) show some substantial changes, including the ones assumed by the Concept of FLED in 2006. The state curricula, syllabuses, methodological recommendations, systems for rating and final assessment have been devised and implemented into practice; international experience taken into account as a model. For foreign language education there is a number of language specialties for the BA, MA and PhD levels: 'Foreign Philology', 'Foreign Language: Two Foreign Languages', 'Translation and Interpretation Studies'.

In the middle 2010-s professorial and lecturing staff of numerous university departments included approximately 90-95% Doctors and Candidates of Sciences as well as PhD and Master specialists. Earlier, in 1995 the Republic Center for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) implemented a project for training and re-training of professional technical staff. In 1996 the Center was transformed into the Education Institute for advanced training of administrative and research pedagogical

personnel. In 2000 as National Centre states the Education Institute was defined as an organizational, methodological and coordinating body in the sphere of CPD personnel training (CPD National Centre, 2015 ).

*Intermediate conclusions on paradigms in foreign language education:*

The author's personal experience in observing this gradual FLE modernization allows identifying the following conceptual and documentary paradigms:

- Legislative determination of languages status (Kazakh, Russian, English);
- Establishment of hierarchical educational institutions (schools, colleges, universities) providing advanced learning of both native and foreign languages;
- Acquirement of professional education and experience both for trainees and pedagogical personnel;
- Disavowal from some traditional forms of research staff education, i.e. ex-USSR forms of post graduate and doctoral education, previously well-known as *aspirantura* and *doctorantura*;
- Implementation of new forms for research staff education according to the Bologna Declaration, i.e. PhD and MA levels;
- Implementation of new specialties in the sphere of professional education, namely humanitarian and technical; higher and postgraduate education(at PhD and MA level);
- Transformation of Qualification Center into Education Institute for advanced training of administrative and research pedagogical personnel.

It seems necessary to stress one of the main mental and cultural paradigms in foreign language education, namely its active direction to intercultural communication *de facto*. There occurred a great paradigm change *from 'learning language in theory' to 'learning language in practice'*. This change, being rather imperceptible at a first glance, has actually led to the entire system modernization of foreign language education in Kazakhstan. The described aspects of foreign language education transformation represent a consequence of this changed paradigm in mental perception, education and life of Kazakhstan new generations.

### **3. Trends in Kazakhstan Foreign Language Education**

Currently a good number of Kazakhstan experts in foreign language education (teachers, professors, researchers, etc.) consider it possible to discuss the national model of polylingual teaching and learning. Zharkynbekova and Nurtazina's opinion can be thoroughly supported here:

...the socio-cultural context for foreign language learning is being changed; it [language] is demanded in the contemporary Kazakhstan society not as a means of communication only, but as a tool of cognitive and professional activity as well. Schools and colleges manifest their increasing interest in polylingual education, where its different models and separate elements are being widely practiced. Alongside with culturally-oriented models, which make it possible for students to master their knowledge in country studies and culture, discipline-oriented models acquire greater popularity due to a foreign language which comes out as a means of learning a discipline.

In this connection, there arise a number of questions: What are the trends? What contemporary trends do reign in modern foreign language education? The FLE paradigms having occurred in the recent past and their consequences, in the author's view, have in many respects determined the contemporary process of foreign languages education.

Kazakhstan global projects and its dynamic activity in the world arena require ever-broader coverage on foreign language education. The Republic integration into the world economic community has been passing on rather successfully; one can observe fast spreading activity of Eurasian Economic Union as evidence. Every year still more countries desire to become the EEU members, and one can observe China, India, Turkey, Egypt, etc. In fact, the languages of these countries belong to the world-spread ones owing to the huge number of their native speakers. Besides, Winter Asian Games-2011 and other sport events held in Kazakhstan as well as Astana victory for hosting EXPO-2017 (gained in 2012) show the outlines of new trends.

It is obvious that Kazakhstan foreign language education (and in some oversea countries) has started surviving a gradual shift to learning and teaching the language of our geopolitical neighbor and partner, i.e. Chinese. Moreover, the reader's attention should be focused on some facts concerning foreign language education in our Republic. Taking into account a variety of political, social, economic and cultural circumstances there has appeared a need in establishing new specializations within official specialties functioning at the university level. For instance, in 2012 the author of this publication initiated the establishment of a new trendy specialization at Philology Faculty of Gumilyov Eurasian National University in cooperation with Chinese Language Department. The specialization aimed at learning a new pair of foreign languages – English and Chinese *paripassu* with a traditional combination of English plus German or French. This specialization was well established within the specialty 'Foreign Language: Two Foreign Languages'. Should the boom regarding this specialization be explained in here? Suffice it to say the number of high school graduates, wishing to be enrolled for the trendy specialization, was two times higher than any time before it. Moreover, let us mention as well that the Chinese Language is much more claimed and needed within the framework of other specialties: 'Foreign Philology' and 'Translation and Interpretation Studies'. The most evident proof for Chinese language popularity in Kazakhstan can be revealed in advertising brochures issued and published by Kazakhstan colleges and universities.

The current generation of young specialists is bilingual or multilingual for they speak *three and/or four languages*: Kazakh and/or Russian as native, English as their first foreign language and Chinese / German / French as their second foreign language. Thus, it is the result of polylingual education, simultaneously being foreign language education in progress. This is a contemporary trend; and a new university release of BA and MA graduates will become its further result. Moreover, the official implementation of these specializations into the MA and PhD levels will benefit the development of this trend. In this sense, the Concept-2006 objectives seem to be actually implemented into practice as well as bringing visible results.

The long-awaited project on learning English implementation at primary school level has become another contemporary trend. In this sense 2013 is the significant year for this trend, since a big number of primary schools (in the state and private sectors) which practice intensified foreign language learning participated in this Republican experiment. It must be admitted that it is far too early to speak about its results. Nevertheless, there are some real expectations concerning improvement of education quality:

- There is a number of young specialists educated under the specialization "Early Foreign Language Learning" (EL Department at Abylay-Khan Kazakh National University for Foreign Languages and Affairs, Almaty City);
- Improved language proficiency of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year primary schoolchildren.

Many forms of FL teaching / learning have become customary due to their active involvement into everyday teaching practice. For instance, information technologies (audio, video, computer, the Internet and all their possible combinations like Skype, SMS- and chat messengers, blogs, etc.) have entered our profession once and forever. Electronic textbooks and manuals have become everyday reality for many practicing teachers and instructors; while the combination of a book and disk seems to be insufficient for FL teachers and learners. Various forms of online language education based on

numerous legal (and, frequently, illegal) platforms makes it possible to both study traditional aspects of a foreign language and to provide alive communication as our primary teaching / learning objective. The combination of face-to-face (in class) and online FL education (out of class), where the latter form includes all kinds of information technologies and methodological support, is *another contemporary trend*. For instance, lectures are represented as audio and video materials, seminars require library / online reading and additional material search, colloquiums are held as webinars or chat rooms, examinations are held as online tests (often time-limited) or as Skype-discussions.

New reality, contemporary demands of numerous trainees to quality and forms of learning make modern KZ pedagogical personnel seek for improving their methods of teaching. It is no wonder that the CPD National Center 'ORLEU' was founded in 2012. Its main functions are to provide pedagogical personnel and administrators (education directors, school principals, college heads, pre-school and high-school administration) with annual CPD improvement programs. The same year a three-month CPD Cambridge program for schoolteachers was implemented. Since 2011, the National Center has been participating in the «E-learning» project (History of the Center, 2015).

A new CPD program for KZ university and college pedagogical personnel started as well. Now, ambitious lecturers can select either their participation in *Bolashak* programs (education at MA or PhD levels or research internships) or in Nazarbaev University programs (CPD development). Founded in 2010 by the initiative of the President of Kazakhstan, Nazarbaev University has become the national brand of higher education, combining advantages of national education system and best world research practice (History Vision, 2015 ). This university is sure to play its eminent part in the process of current FL education development, since today it is the university where teaching is conducted in foreign languages only. Consequently, there has appeared a new trend among ambitious high school graduates to master several foreign languages fluently *before* entering a well-reputed university.

Hence, the logic of establishing numerous (often spontaneous) private lingual and/or linguistic courses, schools and centers for additional FL learning seems understandable and clear; though the quality of teaching in these places leaves much to be desired. Demand, as it is well known, gives birth to proposal, and the latter generates competition; the competition in FL education leads to quality improvement and reasonable balance of proposals. This trend reflects the contemporary situation in the private sector of FL education.

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

- The Republic successful integration into the world economic community reveals an obvious need to teach and learn world-spread foreign languages;
- Increasing popularity of the Chinese language and decreasing popularity of some European languages;
- Growing number of both polylingual young specialists (speaking 3-4 languages) and natural bilingual generation of young Kazakhstan citizens;
- Early foreign language learning / teaching at pre-school and primary school level;
- Wide and overall use of blended learning forms and IT technologies;
- Active development of additional (always voluntary) FL education for all age groups, facilities and possibilities;
- Establishment of new type educational institutions (Nazarbayev University, CPD National Centre) aiming at combining advantages of the national education system and world research practice.

Summing up this discussion upon the new trends in foreign language education, it should be borne in mind that in many respects these trends reflect the ideas planned by the Kazakhstan Concept for FL education and, in their turn, serve to be prerequisites for FL further development.

#### 4. Conclusion

Over the entire history of young Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev has been actively supporting the strategy of wide foreign language education; and it has always been reflected in his annual public Speeches to the People of Kazakhstan. For instance, the Speech-2011 entitled 'Let Us Build Future Together' (see point 2.3 "Development of Languages") says the following:

... speaking three languages is a necessary aspect of own prosperity for a modern Kazakhstan citizen. Therefore, I consider that the portion of our population speaking English must comprise not less than 20% by 2020.

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