



The Use of Kazakh Among University Students in the Context of Native Language and Bilingualism*

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Article Information	ABSTRACT
Received: 28.02.2024	This study analyzes the dominance of Russian in Kazakhstan and the status of Kazakh in the context of native language and bilingualism. The continuation and status of a language is closely related to its transmission to younger generations. For this reason, researchers investigated the status of Kazakh among university students in the context of native language and bilingualism. In the study, researchers tried to determine the degree of use of Kazakh among the students of the Kazakh-American free university in Oskemen, Kazakhstan. The data were collected by applying the "Personal Information Form" and the "Questionnaire on Determining the Degree of Use of Kazakh as a Native Language among University Students" developed by the researchers. The questionnaires were applied to 313 first and second-year students studying in 20 different departments at the university. Researchers examined whether the degree of use of Kazakh as a native language among university students showed a significant difference according to the variables of "gender, age, year of study, and nationality".
Accepted: 27.06.2024	
Online First: 30.07.2024	
Published: 31.07.2024	
doi: 10.16986/HUJE.2024.523	Keywords: Kazakh and Russian languages, native language, language preference among students
	Article Type: Research Article

Citation Information: Duman, G. B., & Mukazhanova, A. (2024). The use of Kazakh among university students in the context of native language and bilingualism. *Hacettepe University Journal of Education*, 39(3), 271-280. <https://doi.org/10.16986/HUJE.2024.523>

1. INTRODUCTION

Knowing a second language in addition to your mother tongue is almost a necessity in today's world. Multilingual individuals generally have a more advantageous situation in both business and social life. Looking at the world from a wider perspective and being able to follow the developments in the world from different media with different points of view are also closely related to being multilingual.

Everything around the world is affected by globalization. Technological developments, mass media, traveling, shortening distances, education, migration and the global economy have made communication between people more widespread. As a result of the increase in the extent of interaction, the value and market demand for those who speak two or more languages have increased. The use of more than one language is common all over the world, of all societies, all age groups and many countries (Bican, 2017, p. 354). Today, the new generation is expected to know a second language. In particular, young people who dream of studying or getting job opportunities abroad, etc. Should know the language of the country they plan to go to. Some countries even require that foreigners know the local language before accepting them into their countries as residents, workers, refugees, etc. It is necessary for newcomers to know the language of the country in order to adapt to the country and integrate with the society, and for this reason, it is a normal approach for states to require language proficiency from those who will reside in the country for a long time.

As in the cases of the dissolution of the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia, sometimes the borders of countries change due to political developments and new states are established on the reconfigured territories (Uludağ, 1992). This change of borders can sometimes lead to a change in the ethnic distribution and native language of the country. In such a situation, it is natural to expect the people living in the country to know the native language. In order to provide cohesion and unity in society, all citizens should know the common language.

* This study was ethically approved by the Kazakh American Free University with its decision dated 08.12.2023 and numbered 01-04-479.

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One of the states established with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 was Kazakhstan. Due to the colonization and Russification policy of the USSR, Russian settlers were placed in the Kazakh geography during the Soviet era. In fact, the Russification of the region was so intense that the indigenous Kazakhs lost their “majority status” and became a minority at that time. In addition, as a result of the language policies implemented by the USSR, attempts were made to end the use of indigenous languages and to make Russian the common language of the entire nation. While the Russians who settled in various regions of what would become Kazakhstan did not deign to learn the local languages, the local people were required to learn Russian as a result of the sanctions imposed upon them. Thus, Russian rose to the status of the common and most spoken language throughout the nation. After the separation of Kazakhstan from the USSR in 1991, Kazakhs regained their population “majority status” while Russians living in the region have already become a minority by emigrating to other countries.

In Kazakhstan, Kazakh is considered to be the nation’s mother tongue and Russian is the second official language along with Kazakh. More than 30 years have passed since independence. Even though ‘decades have passed, it is obvious that the destructive effects of the Russification and language policies carried out during the USSR period in Kazakhstan continue. Russians, who are living in Kazakhstan and considered as a minority, generally do not even deign to learn Kazakh. It is even possible to come across Kazakh families who use Russian as their daily language instead of Kazakh. All these are the consequences of the language policies of the USSR period.

In Kazakhstan, the Kazakh (ethnic Kazakh people) population ranks first throughout the country. However, in some cities the Russian population is still significant. One of these cities is Oskemen (Ust-Kamenegorsk) in the East Kazakhstan region. The city was populated almost entirely by Russians during the USSR period. The population of Russians today in Oskemen is around 51%. The dominance of Russian language is still felt in the city (Mukazhanova, 2023).

In this study, the use of Kazakh among university students in the context of native language and bilingualism was analyzed. The attitude of the students of the Kazakh American Free University (in Oskemen) towards Kazakh and Russian were examined. With the help of the questionnaire given to the participants, researchers attempted to determine whether the degree of use of Kazakh as a native language by university students showed a significant difference according to the variables of "gender, age, year of study" and, more importantly, "nationality." In the study, researchers also examined whether there is a significant difference in the language use preferences of university students in the context of their families, friends, education and daily lives.

1.1. Status of the Kazakh Language Before and After the Independence of Kazakhstan

In order to understand the status of the Kazakh language after independence, it is necessary to know the language and settlement policies carried out during Tsarist Russia and the USSR. After the Russian occupation of the region, both the Kazakh people and the Kazakh language lost their status and were gradually made to assimilate. It should be noted that the effect of this continues after independence and affects the current status of Kazakh language today.

In the second half of the 19th century, the Russian Empire completed its conquest of Turkestan, now commonly known as Central Asia. One of the regions occupied and colonized by the Russian Empire were the Kazakh lands as well. “Due to the vastness of the territory and the bravery of the Kazakhs, the Russians could not fully occupy Kazakh lands until the beginning of the second half of the 19th century, that is, until 1846, even until 1873, when Kenesary Kasym, the grandson of Ablai Khan, was martyred. On the one hand it has been supposed that Kazakhs could resist Russian invasions, on the other hand this invasions were continuing in other parts of the Kazakh lands” (Ölçekçi, 1996, p. 56).

The Russians started to settle the lands they invaded with settlers they brought from the West, especially Russians. Russian peasants who were against tsarism were also sent to these regions under this policy, as rebellions of peasants, who had no legal rights and who were perceived as property of landowners, frightened the government. “When it became clear that the tsar's throne and the entire state were in danger, in 1861 Tsar Alexander II issued an edict to free the peasants from servitude. Although the tsar's decree was hailed in history as the liberation of the peasant population, however this was not complete liberation. Because the government did not give the peasants a land to live in” (Ölçekçi, 1996, p. 57). Unable to find a balance between the property owners and the peasants, the Tsar found the solution in migrating the peasants to non-Russian lands such as the Caucasus, Siberia and Turkestan. Kazakhstan was among the places where Russian peasants migrated intensively. According to the official sources of the tsarist government, in 1917, 45 (forty-five) million hectares of land were withdrawn from the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan in order to be given to Russian emigrants (Çokay, 1988, p. 53), (Ölçekçi, 1996, p. 57). The Russian peasants, who were not treated as human beings in their own lands and were bought and sold like goods, not only owned the lands of the local people for free, but also assumed the role of the master of the local people in Kazakh lands. Ölçekçi (1996: 57) states this situation as follows: “We should also add that the Russian immigrant peasant brought to Turkestan was considered the real owner of the land he owned. In this case, the Russian peasants, who had an anti-government revolutionary spirit in Russia, became the support of this government in Turkestan.”

After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Tsarist Russia collapsed at the beginning of the 20th century and the USSR was established in its place. The expectations of the local people in Turkestan, who thought that things would change positively for them after the revolution, did not become true, and the newly established government inherited Tsarist Russia's colonization

plans for Turkestan as a political legacy (Hatunoğlu, 2014, pp. 1166-1167). The real assimilation and destruction of the Russians began after 1917 (Yalçın, 2008, p. 1940). During the USSR period, the economically strategically important lands in particular were taken from the local people and those lands were transformed into Russian settlements.

The numerical data given by Ölçekçi (1996) and Uludağ (1992) on the population of Kazakhstan reveal how the territory of Kazakhstan was Russified step-by-step both during the period of Tsarist Russia and the USSR, and how the indigenous Kazakh people were artificially reduced to a minority: "Kazakhstan was the place where the Russian population increased the most. In 1926, Russians constituted only 20 percent of Kazakhstan's population, whereas in 1959, in 33 years, their number increased by 230 percent, from 1,214,800 to 4,014,000 people, and Russians' share in Kazakhstan's population reached 43.1 percent. Apart from the rapid increase in the Russian population, one of the important reasons for such a high ratio to the general population is the genocide and exile policies carried out against the Kazakhs (Uludağ, 1992, p. 281), (Ölçekçi, 1996, p. 57).

On the one hand, the Slavic population in Kazakhstan was artificially increased by placing them in regions of strategic and economic importance, while on the other, the Kazakh population tried to be reduced. The local Kazakh population was systematically reduced by artificial means such as the artificial famine carried out by Stalin in 1932-1933, the executions and deportations carried out by Stalin in 1937-38, and the driving of the local population to the front lines as pawns in World War II. "Among the Turkic countries under Soviet occupation, Kazakhstan, which has the largest economic resources, has the highest rate of urban population growth (Uludağ, 1992, p. 253). Uludağ and Serin (1990), while giving the rates of abnormal population growth in some cities, also gave information about the population of Oskemen (Ust-Kamenogorsk), the city where our research was conducted. The authors pointed out that the population of the city increased by 641%. This increase was due to the economic importance of the city as a mining center.

Both the territory and languages of Central Asia were deliberately invaded. The most important step of the Russification policy was that of making Russian the common language (first language) for all people in the USSR (Uludağ & Serin, 1990). Local dialects in the region were highlighted and transformed into separate languages, thus the linguistic unity among the people of Turkic origin was disrupted in the name of "linguistic freedom." Russian became the dominant language everywhere, especially in education. This situation made it compulsory for locals to learn Russian in order to get an education, to find a prestigious job, or even to survive, and over time this situation led to a feeling of worthlessness towards the Kazakh language.

While the local population learned Russian, the Russians persistently did not learn any Kazakh. While Russian increased its influence in all parts of life, the Kazakh language gradually lost its importance day by day. Some of the local families stopped passing on their mother tongue to their children due to the dominance of Russian, and future generations began to learn Russian as their mother tongue: they did not even realize that their mother tongue was Kazakh. Knowing the process of assimilation of Kazakh before independence will help to understand the status of Kazakh in relation to Russian in Kazakhstan.

After Kazakhstan became an independent republic, the population distribution in the country started to change rapidly in favor of Kazakhs, and as a result of the voluntary emigration of many Russians to different countries, Kazakhs have replaced Russians as the dominant ethnic group. On the one hand, depending on the population and with the encouragement of the state, Kazakh language has also rapidly regained its status as the mother tongue of the country and has become widespread throughout the country; on the other, perhaps with a view to preserving the political balance, Russian has been accepted as the official language of the country along with Kazakh. Russian still has the status of an official language in the country. The dominance of Russian in the country could not be broken due to the fact that the Russians remaining in the country did not learn Kazakh. In addition, even though the Russian population has decreased throughout the country, the Russian population is still the majority in some strategic and economically important cities. As a result, Russian is the dominant language in Oskemen, as well as in many other cities of Kazakhstan today. Sokolov (2022) provides the following information on the decline of the Russian population after independence: "They are now the majority in only four of the 22 cities with a population of more than 100,000 people: Oskemen (50%), Petropavlovsk (59%), Temirtau (52%) and Rudny (54%)." As can be seen, one of the cities where ethnic Russians are still heavily concentrated is Oskemen, where the research was conducted.

Although the status of the Kazakh language has increased after Kazakhstan gained its independence, the Russian pressure in the country has not been completely stopped. Although there are many reasons for this, including the fact that Russia, which has not given up its ambitions in the region, continues to spread Russian culture and language in Kazakhstan through many political-economic-social-cultural channels. In fact, the presence of Russian schools alongside Kazakh schools in the country creates a sufficient environment for the continuation of Russian culture and Russian language. The language mentality of the USSR period did not disappear after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian Federation is still working effectively to maintain the influence of Russian in the Commonwealth of Independent States. Especially with the excuse of the Russian population in the region, Russian language is ensured to maintain its vitality in the region through certain associations and organizations, and Russian maintains its power and status both in the field of media and education. "Using language as a tool in addition to population policies, Russia endeavours to prevent the shrinkage of the Russian language in the former Soviet geography. For this purpose, various programmes are being developed both at state and NGO (non-governmental organisations) level" (Nogayeva, 2012, p. 187).

In the Russian politics of the Putin era, "the attitude of interfering in the internal affairs of countries by using the peoples of Russian origin outside Russia as an excuse" is felt: "With Putin's coming to power, the "Russian issue" has gained a different dimension. In addition to Russia's interest in its compatriots in the region at the state level, there are numerous organisations and associations today that have the task of protecting the interests of the Russian population. These organisations have a wide range of objectives, ranging from the promotion of Russian and Russian-language education to the promotion of Orthodox religion and support for joining the Russian army. These activities bring with them the problem of integration of the Russian population in Kazakhstan" (Nogayeva, 2012, p. 185).

The data given by Abdurasulov (2007) also supports Nogayeva's view. "The Language Law adopted in 1989 established Kazakh as the state language and Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication. Thus, for the first time, the Russian population of Kazakhstan faced the need to learn the Kazakh language. However, the majority of Russians chose either to move or not to enter the public sector, where knowledge of the Kazakh language was required. As a result, by 2000 only 1% of the Russian population could speak the state language." As can be seen, after 10 years of the Language Law, only 1% of Russians have learned Kazakh. This data shows that Russians maintain their USSR-era perspective on Kazakh and have not yet realized that they live in a newly independent country.

Nogayeva (2012, p.185) states that "In addition to Russia's interest in its compatriots in the region at the state level, today there are a large number of organisations and associations that undertake the task of protecting the interests of the Russian population." The same author gives the number of Russian associations and organizations operating in Kazakhstan in 2012 as 43, as mentioned on the website of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Russia continues its educational activities in the independent Post Soviet republics intensively and still tries to maintain its influence. Russia first intervened in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia on the pretext of protecting its own people, and then Crimea had its share of Russia's aggressive attitude. Russia started the ongoing Ukrainian-Russian war with the same justification (Çalışkan, 2021, p. 2). For this reason, it would be appropriate for Kazakhstan to take measures to ensure the harmonization of the Russians living in the country. The first step to this is language unity. It is easier for people who speak the same language to understand each other and meet at a common point. The political-social-cultural activities carried out by Russia in Kazakhstan damage the sense of belonging of Russians in Kazakhstan and make it difficult for them to adapt to the country.

1.2. The Situation in Kazakhstan in the Context of Bilingualism and Native Language

On the website of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan, it is possible to find details of the language law of Kazakhstan. Article 4 about the "State language of the Republic of Kazakhstan" states: "State language of the republic of Kazakhstan shall be Kazakh language," and "The duty of every citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan shall be the mastery of the state language that shall be the most important factor in the consolidation of the people of Kazakhstan," (Adilet, 1997). According to the law on languages of the Republic, all citizens of Kazakhstan must learn and speak the Kazakh language. Article 5 about "The use of Russian language" states: "In governmental organizations and local government on a level with Kazakh language officially shall be used Russian language" (Adilet, 1997). It can be noted that even the Language Law itself gives freedom to use Russian as an official language.

As can be seen, the Kazakh government has not only adopted Kazakh as the state language, but has also treated Russian equally with Kazakh in the status of official language. In short, the Kazakh government has shown goodwill, has not taken an exclusionary attitude towards different ethnic groups in the country, and has not displayed a racist approach. Moreover, by opening free Kazakh courses for citizens who do not speak Kazakh in Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan has provided them with all kinds of educational opportunities to learn Kazakh. On the other hand, the number of Russians learning Kazakh as a second language is quite small in the country, despite it being the constitutional duty of all citizens in the country to learn and know the native language.

More than 30 years have passed since independence: that means that at least two or even three subsequent generations have been born and raised in the territory of independent Kazakhstan. This 30-year period is enough time for Kazakh, the mother tongue of the country, to be learned by the non-native ethnic groups living in the country. Of course, after all this time, Kazakh is in a much better position than it was during the Soviet period. On the other hand, it is not possible to say that Kazakh has become a mother tongue throughout the country and among all ethnic groups. Minorities living in the country, especially Russians, still use Russian as the only language of communication and do not learn Kazakh as a second language. Learning a language as a second language is closely related to individual and social attitudes. Hoffmann expresses this situation as follows: "Bilingualism arises as a result of contact. Whether it spreads throughout the community and is maintained depends on whether the conditions for its development are right. These, in turn, are determined by individual and group attitudes towards (1) the two languages involved, and (2) bilingualism itself" (Hoffmann, 2014, p. 3).

When the native language environment changes due to various reasons such as migration or changes in political maps, every individual is expected to learn the native language of the country they live in (Akbarov,2018). Just as people who change countries for different reasons have to learn the mother tongue of the country they are traveling to, it is a normal expectation

that the people who continue to live in that country are expected to know the mother tongue of the country. Otherwise, it is not possible to talk about a complete fusion and integration between native- and non-native-speaking peoples. People learn the language of the country they go to in order to live more comfortably in that country and to adapt to the society; in the same way, it is a normal situation that minority people living in Kazakhstan are willing to learn Kazakh, the state language of the country, as well as maintaining their mother tongue. However, it is very interesting that this natural process is not effective in Kazakhstan.

It is often stated that bilingualism is a richness. However, as in the case of Kazakhstan, when one party learns the other party's language along with his/her native language, while the other party do not want to learn the other party's language, it will trigger divisions and lead to social problems. While Kazakhs learn Russian along with their mother tongue, Russians do not learn any Kazakh at all. This issue has lasted for more than 30 years since Kazakhstan's independence. "In the first place, individual bilingualism is often experienced as an enriching attribute that facilitates a better understanding of the nature of language and provides an opportunity for gaining a deeper insight into two cultures," (Hoffmann, 2014, p.5). The opportunity mentioned by Hoffmann (2014) is not fully realized in Kazakhstan.

Although it is stated that bilingualism is a richness, it is sometimes forbidden in European countries for refugee children to communicate with each other in education institutions using their mother tongues that are not native to Europe. Tolerance is shown only for European languages such as English, French and German, and double standards are applied. Of course, every individual's self-expression in his/her mother tongue should be tolerated. At the same time, every individual must also learn the official language of the state. Just as it is wrong for the state to ban the mother tongue of individuals, it is also wrong for people living in the country to insist on not learning the mother tongue of the state. The communication of individuals in the common language will serve as a bond that brings individuals and the state closer to each other. After Kazakhstan became an independent state, the newly established government did not ban Russian, which was the official language of the country until then, but accepted Kazakh as the mother tongue. It should be expected that the Russians living within the borders of the country will eventually learn Kazakh, the state language of the country, as a second language.

Although Kazakhstan is a Kazakh country, as a result of the settlement policies of Tsarist Russia and the USSR, the country has a multinational composition consisting of citizens of different ethnic origins. Fasold on this subject: "It is obvious that multilingual states have problems that more nearly monolingual ones do not. On the strictly practical level, difficulties in communication within a country can act as an impediment to commerce and industry and be socially disruptive. But more seriously, multilingualism works against nationalism. Given that nation-states are more likely to be stable than multinational states, and given the importance of language for nationalism, the development of a sense of nation is more difficult for a multilingual state than for a monolingual one" (Fasold, 1987, p. 4). Here and now, the issue of language is largely an issue of the survival of the nation and state. Juravlev (2011) also emphasises the importance of language for the young republics of Central Asia. However, the author also states in his article that the solution to the language problem will be solved by the continuation of Russian as the common language of agreement among all the young Post-Soviet republics, and he shows that he supports Russian: "...studying in a Russian school or university is prestigious, Russian education is a sign of belonging to the elite" (Juravlev, 2011). As long as the Soviet-era attitude of looking down on local languages continues among Russian-speaking minorities, Kazakh will not enjoy the recognition it deserves as a mother tongue. Measures should be taken to break this perspective and the reputation of Kazakh should be raised throughout the country. Language unity is an important factor in both the survival of the state and the cohesion of its citizens.

2. METHODOLOGY

In the method section, information about the research model, instruments and data collection tools, and participants and location of the study is given. In this descriptive research study, the survey model based on quantitative data was applied. A quantitative research method deals with quantifying and analysis variables in order to get results. It involves the utilization and analysis of numerical data using specific statistical techniques to answer questions like who, how much, what, where, when, how many, and how (Apuke, 2017, p. 41), (Karasar, 2011).

2.1. Participants

Kazakh-American free university, which supplied the participants of the study, is located in Oskemen in the East Kazakhstan region. The total number of students in the first and second years of formal education at KAFU in the 2022-2023 academic year was 712. The number of students taking part in the study was 209 (66.8%) from the first year and 104 (33.2%) from the second year, totaling 313 students. The population of this study consisted of first and second-year students studying in 20 different departments at KAFU. All of these 20 departments are separated into Kazakh- and Russian-language sections. From the total number, 192 (61.3%) of students were from Russian sections and 121 (38.7%) were from Kazakh sections.

Table 1.

Departments, Number and Percentage of Students Participating in the Research

Departments	Number	%
Physical Education	41	13.1
Finance	6	1.9
Accounting	5	1.6
Translation Studies	61	19.5
Marketing and PR Management	2	.6
Psychology	25	8.0
Restaurant and Hotel Services	4	1.3
Russian Language and Literature	2	.6
Tourism	4	1.3
International Relations	10	3.2
Foreign Languages	51	16.3
IT	19	6.1
Economy	1	.3
Journalism	15	4.8
Law	16	5.1
Law and Customs	2	.6
Law and Policing	19	6.1
Management	13	4.2
Kazakh Language and Literature	17	5.4
Total	313	100.0

The students who took part in the research study in 20 different departments. About 19.5 % of the students' study in the departments of translation studies, 16.3% in foreign languages, 13.1% in physical education, 8% in psychology, 6,1% in IT, 6.1% in law and policing, 5.4% in Kazakh language and literature, as well as 5.1% in law. The percentage of students studying in other departments is less than 5%.

2.2. Instruments

In this study, the "Personal Information Form" and "Questionnaire on determining the degree of use of Kazakh as a native language among university students," developed by the researchers, were used as data collection instruments. The survey questions in the study were applied after the ethical approval of KAFU administration. There are 4 questions on the "Personal Information Form" applied to the students. The Personal Information Form includes questions about the students' 1. gender (female, male); 2. age (16 - 18 years, 19 - 20 years, 21- 22 years); 3. year of study (first, second); 4. nationality (Kazakh, Russian, Kazakh and Russian mixed, and others). "Questionnaire on determining the degree of use of Kazakh as a native language among university students" consists of 13 questions. The items in the questionnaire are graded as "Always = 4.50 - 5.0," "Mostly = 3.50 - 4.49," "Sometimes = 2.51 - 3.49," "Rarely = 1.51 - 2.50," "Very little = 1.0 - 1.50." The personal information form and questionnaire were translated into Kazakh and Russian and presented to the students participating in the study in their language of choice.

3. FINDINGS

The number of female students participating in the study was 195, while the number of male students was 118. According to the age variable, the number of students between the age range 16-18 was 184, the number of students between the age range 19-20 was 109 and the number of students between the age range 21-22 was 20. According to the year of study variable, 209 students were first-year students and 104 students were second-year students. In the questionnaire applied to the participants, it was seen that there was no significant difference in the degree of use of Kazakh as a native language among students according to the following variables "gender, age and year of study."

After independence, the Russian education system was not terminated, and "Kazakh schools" were opened as an alternative to Russian schools. This situation caused a double-headedness in education and prevented the Russian-speaking people in the country from learning Kazakh. It would not be wrong to say that Russian is still more dominant than Kazakh in today's higher education environment. Looking at the number of students studying in Kazakh and Russian programs among the first- and second-year students at Kazakh-American free university in the 2022-2023 academic year, it was seen that Russian programs are more preferred. In the first-year group, 114 students study in Kazakh sections and 225 students study in Russian sections, while among the second-year group, 127 students study in Kazakh sections and 246 students study in Russian sections. The number of students studying in Russian sections is approximately twice the number of students studying in Kazakh sections.

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics of the Items Related to Determining the Degree of Use of Kazakh as a Native Language Among University Students According to Their Ethnicity

Items	Russian		Kazakh		Russian-Kazakh (Mixed)		Others	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Item 1	1.92	.98	3.97	1.11	2.26	1.32	2.50	1.16
Item 2	4.59	.55	3.19	1.20	4.16	.83	4.57	.64
Item 3	1.62	1.05	3.49	1.31	1.95	1.12	1.79	.89
Item 4	4.07	1.16	3.21	1.14	3.63	1.21	3.64	1.39
Item 5	4.39	.81	4.29	.88	4.26	.65	4.21	.57
Item 6	1.79	.92	4.03	1.06	2.21	1.13	2.57	1.01
Item 7	4.83	.37	3.28	1.11	4.58	.69	4.50	.51
Item 8	1.20	.58	4.27	1.00	1.95	1.12	2.29	1.32
Item 9	4.99	.09	2.82	1.28	4.63	.68	4.64	.63
Item 10	1.24	.54	4.24	1.06	2.16	1.25	1.79	1.05
Item 11	4.99	.09	2.81	1.35	4.58	.69	4.86	.36
Item 12	1.37	.68	4.04	1.19	2.00	1.24	1.86	.86
Item 13	4.89	.31	3.74	1.14	4.63	.76	4.57	1.08

Students whose ethnicity is Russian prefer Kazakh as a language in education rarely ($\bar{x} = 1,92$), while they always prefer Russian ($\bar{x} = 4,59$) as a language in education. Students whose nationality is Kazakh prefer Kazakh language mostly ($\bar{x} = 3,94$) as a language in education, however these students sometimes ($\bar{x} = 3,19$) prefer Russian as a language in education as well. Students who are coming from mixed Russian and Kazakh families claimed that they always ($\bar{x} = 4,57$) prefer Russian and rarely ($\bar{x} = 2,50$) Kazakh as the language in education. These numerical data reveal that while Russian and mixed students prefer Kazakh less, Kazakh students are using both the Kazakh and Russian languages at the same level.

Analyses showed that Russian students prefer to use Kazakh sources rarely ($\bar{x} = 1,62$) and mostly ($\bar{x} = 4,07$) Russian sources while preparing for their lessons, while Kazakh students use Kazakh and Russian sources almost equally: sometimes ($\bar{x} = 3,49$) Kazakh and sometimes ($\bar{x} = 3,19$) Russian sources. These numerical data again demonstrate that Kazakh students are competent in both Kazakh and Russian. The third group of mixed students from Russian-Kazakh families pointed out that they prefer to work always ($\bar{x} = 3,64$) with Russian and rarely ($\bar{x} = 1,79$) with Kazakh sources.

The research revealed that Russian and mixed students always prefer to speak Russian with their friends ($\bar{x} = 4,50$), while they prefer to speak Kazakh only sometimes ($\bar{x} = 2,57$). Students whose ethnicity is Kazakh prefer to speak Kazakh mostly ($\bar{x} = 4,03$) and sometimes ($\bar{x} = 3,28$) Russian with their friends. These numerical data clarify that Russian is the most common language of communication among young people. As Akanova, who conducted a similar study on students stated, it is more attractive to use Russian as a language of communication among young people than Kazakh (2017, p.3).

According to the results, students whose nationality is Russian always ($\bar{x} = 4,99$) prefer to speak Russian with their families and very little ($\bar{x} = 1,20$) prefer to speak Kazakh. Students whose nationality is Kazakh mostly ($\bar{x} = 4,27$) prefer to speak Kazakh with their families and sometimes ($\bar{x} = 2,82$) Russian. Mixed students answered that they always ($\bar{x} = 4,64$) prefer to speak Russian with their families and little ($\bar{x} = 2,29$) Kazakh within the family. Kazakh society is predominantly dominated by Kazakh-Russian bilingualism due to historical, cultural and geopolitical reasons (Yesgeldiyeva & Tazhibayeva, 2015). Therefore, the Kazakh people speak both languages at a sufficient level, actively using a non-native language as their primary language in everyday communication (Mazhitayeva, et al., 2016). Alekseyenko (2014) states that Kazakhs who come to big cities in order to get an education or a job still have to learn Russian so that they can survive in a big city. Because of the large number of Russian speakers in the country, Russian remains the most commonly used language in Kazakhstan. While some of the new generations in the country, especially citizens of Russian origin, do not want to learn Kazakh, almost all individuals of the new generation no matter Russians or Kazakhs learn Russian as their mother tongue or second language. This situation may pose a problem for the continuation of the Kazakh language and the survival of the country. Regarding the uneven bilingualism in the country, Tazhibayeva and Kozirev said: "It is becoming increasingly clear that delaying the solution of this problem in the long term will lead to an even greater increase in the potential for conflict in Kazakhstan society. It is desirable that in the next few years the state should realise concrete changes in the process of genuine implementation of the Kazakh language. First of all, it is necessary to ensure that at least young and socially active representatives of the Russian-speaking population master the state language as soon as possible - even if they do not speak Kazakh in the first place, they should at least passively learn this language to a sufficient level of understanding," (Tazhibayeva & Kozirev, 2015, p. 129). Tazhibayeva and Kozirev point out that the language problem in Kazakhstan is a problem with conflict potential that urgently requires a solution.

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics of the Items Related to Determine the Degree of Use of Kazakh as a Native Language Among University Students

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
1. I prefer Kazakh as the language of education	3.13	1.45	1	5
2. I prefer Russian as the language of education	3.77	1.19	1	5
3. I use Kazakh sources while preparing for my classes	2.7	1.50	1	5
4. I use Russian sources while preparing for my classes	3.54	1.22	1	5
5. The classes are taught in a language of the department we have chosen.	4.32	0.83	1	5
6. I speak Kazakh with my friends	3.12	1.46	1	5
7. I speak Russian with my friends	3.93	1.15	1	5
8. I speak Kazakh with my family	3.03	1.70	1	5
9. I speak Russian with my family	3.73	1.43	1	5
10. In my family Kazakh is spoken	3.02	1.69	1	5
11. In my family Russian is spoken	3.73	1.47	1	5
12. I can express myself more easily in Kazakh	2.94	1.64	1	5
13. I can express myself more easily in Russian	4.21	1.07	1	5

A questionnaire consisting of 13 items was applied to the students to determine the degree of use of Kazakh as a native language among university students. As a result of the questionnaire, it is seen that students sometimes ($\bar{x} = 3,13$) prefer Kazakh as the language of education and mostly ($\bar{x} = 3,77$) prefer Russian as the language of education. The study revealed that students prefer to use mostly Russian sources while preparing for their classes in comparison to Kazakh. According to the results of the survey, students mostly prefer to speak Russian with their friends. It is also obvious that students mostly prefer to speak Russian with their family. The fact that within the family Russian is the most spoken language also supports the previous results. Lastly, students were more comfortable expressing themselves in Russian ($\bar{x} = 4,21$), and only sometimes in Kazakh ($\bar{x} = 2,94$).

4. RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Language is one of the basic building blocks that ensure the continuity of nations. In 1989, Kazakh was declared the official language of Kazakhstan, and in 1995, Russian was also given official language status in the country. During the USSR period, locals were forced to learn Russian while Russian settlers did not feel any need to learn the local language. Although more than 30 years have passed since independence, the attitude of Russians living in Kazakhstan continues as it was during the USSR period.

Although Kazakh is identified in the constitution as the state language and Article 4. of the constitution states that every citizen of Kazakhstan should learn Kazakh, the majority of Russians living in Kazakhstan do not dedicate themselves to learning Kazakh. In short, despite all these years of independence, Russian is still the most widespread and dominant language in Kazakhstan. Especially in cities like Oskemen, where the Russian population is densely populated, Russian makes itself felt in all areas of life as the dominant language.

This study, conducted at the Kazakh-American free university in Oskemen, revealed that Russian students and mixed students cannot express themselves sufficiently in Kazakh and that they predominantly prefer Russian as their mother tongue. Kazakh students stated that they can express themselves comfortably enough in both Kazakh and Russian, and that they can use both languages depending on the situation. As can be seen, the descriptive statistics of the items related to determining the degree of use of Kazakh as a mother tongue among university students prove that Russian is more preferred than Kazakh in every field. The results of the research demonstrate that: Russian is more common among university students than Kazakh; that there is no equal bilingualism in Kazakhstan; and that Russian remains the dominant language in the country despite the fact that more than 30 years have passed since independence. Of course, these numerical data belong to the city of Oskemen, where the Russian population is dense. In Kazakhstan, which has a wide geography, different results can be found in different regions. For this reason, conducting similar studies throughout the country will demonstrate the general picture in Kazakhstan more clearly.

In Kazakhstan, Kazakh and Russian have different degrees of usage in different parts of the country, but Russian has not lost its influence throughout the country. There are many reasons for this situation. One of them is that the traces of the language policies implemented by the Russians during the USSR period have not yet been completely erased. Although the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan is trying to give the Kazakh language the value it deserves since independence, the progress made by the government towards Kazakh language growth does not seem sufficient. For this reason, it would be appropriate for the government to reconsider the measures taken and to try to take more effective measures.

It is seen that most of the Russians who claim that they know Kazakh as a second language lack deeper skills beyond simple vocabulary. For this reason, the results of the participants of the study should not be taken into account alone. It is thought that conducting additional studies to measure the language skills and levels of participants in different studies will provide clearer results. In addition, researchers should count the large number of people in Kazakhstan who are Kazakh but do not speak or

cannot speak any Kazakh. Taking into account this phenomenon in Kazakhstan, further studies on defining to what extent Kazakhs know Kazakh as a native language or second language will reveal the status of Kazakh in the country more clearly.

A common language is one of the most important elements of nation statehood. The integration of society and the ability of each individual to see themselves as part of the country depends on linguistic unity. For this reason, even if the use of Russian is allowed as a cultural language in Kazakhstan, the duality in terms of native language and official language should be ended.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

This study complies with research and publication ethics. Approval for this research and permission was obtained from First Vice-President of Kazakh American Free University, Oskemen, Kazakhstan, on 14.03.2023.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

The preparation of this paper encompasses the same level of contribution by both of the authors from the determination of the study subject to the reporting of the data.

Statement of Interest

There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

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