



# Language Use among Secondary School Students in Kazakhstan

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## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the results of a survey conducted among 76 urban high school students of both genders at a school in Astana, Kazakhstan, to compare patterns of language use among children from classes with Russian and Kazakh language of instruction. The study revealed that Russian continues to dominate most of the spheres of language use and is utilized as the main language of communication by over 50% of students enrolled in Russian classes, as well as the alternate language of communication with peers by around 70% of the Kazakh-speaking youth attending Kazakh classes. The study also revealed that immediate family, including parents and grandparents in particular, play an important role in preserving the use of Kazakh as the main language of communication. Seventy seven percent of students in Kazakh classes use exclusively Kazakh in communication with grandparents. Meanwhile, in bilingual and Russian-speaking families parents no longer push the use of Kazakh by children with only 19% of children using exclusively Kazakh with grandparents. Importantly, the study revealed that children in both groups increasingly rely on the use of Russian and English in communication across various modern media, such as TV and the Internet. The study concludes that the continuing dominance of Russian may create challenges for maintenance of Kazakh during introduction of trilingual education policy and recommends that greater attention should be paid by policy makers to development of Internet content in Kazakh, while ethnic Kazakh parents should maintain a stricter monolingual policy at home to preserve Kazakh.

**Keywords:** Language policy; multilingualism; trilingualism; language use.

## 1. Introduction

Kazakhstan is a post-Soviet state located on the border with Russia, China and several other post-Soviet countries in Central Asia. Kazakhstan is home to over 125 ethnicities (Agency for Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2011, p. 20) with the total population exceeding 18 million people, where Kazakhs constitute the majority (63.6%), followed by Russians (23.7%), Uzbeks 2.9%, Ukrainians 2.1%, Uygur 1.4%, Tatars 1.3%, Germans 1.1%, and others 3.9% (Statistical Committee of Kazakhstan, 2016). Linguistic situation in Kazakhstan remains one of the most complicated among the countries of the former Soviet Union. At the point of dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan was

the only republic, where the titular nationality's language was spoken by the minority of the population with a substantial proportion of ethnic Kazakhs not being able to communicate in the Kazakh language and Russian being the language used by the majority (Kuzhabekova, 2003, 2008). The low status and the extent of use of the Kazakh language was a result of two processes. The first process was the planned Russification policy of the Soviet Union. The policy promoted the use of Russian as the main language of communication in the state, as well as the carrier of the Soviet identity. The second process was the "great influx of monolingual Russian speakers and their concentration in political, economic, and cultural centers" (Smagulova, 2008, p. 442). This influx was as an outcome of industrialization, Khrushchev's campaign of raising the virgin lands and the forceful deportation from other parts of the Soviet Union to Kazakhstan of the ethnic groups, which were viewed as unreliable by Stalin during the World War II. By 1989, the share of Kazakhs speaking Russian constituted 62.8%, while the share of Russians speaking Kazakh was less than 1% (State Committee on Statistics, 1989).

Given the complex linguistic situation, since the first days of the country's independence the language policy has been simultaneously pursuing the following three goals: (1) the restoration of the status and increasing the extent of use of the Kazakh language as the new language of national identity, especially among ethnic Kazakhs, for whom the language was also the language of ethnic identity; (2) the preservation of the extent of use of the Russian language given the large representation of ethnic Russians and other Russian-speaking minorities in the country, the proximity of the Russian border, and the language's status as a language of international communication, and (3) the popularization and increasing the extent of use of the English language, a new global Lingua Franca associated with both national and individual progressiveness and success in the global competition (Kuzhabekova, 2003). In the first years of independence much of the effort was focused on the promotion of Kazakh. The language was gradually being introduced as the main language of instruction in an increasing number of schools and universities, as the language of official communication in the government, and the media, as well as the language of mass culture (Kuzhabekova, 2003). Importantly, Russian continued to retain a high status in the society, while the role and the use of English were relatively low (Smagulova, 2008).

Over the last couple of years, as the number of Kazakh-speakers was increasing partially due to out-migration of ethnic Russians and, partially, due to government's language-promoting efforts (Mehisto, 2015), the agenda of accelerating innovation-driven economic growth, and the creation of an internationally competitive knowledge economy has gained in prominence, the government have started to more aggressively promote Kazakh and English (OECD, 2018). The idea of societal trilingualism received a renewed attention and was strongly emphasized in the President's Annual Address in 2012 (Nazarbayev 2012, p. 12). In 2015, the Road Map for Trilingual Education Development for 2015-2020 (Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan (MoES, 2015) was adopted to launch the process of introduction of tri-lingual education, which implied a gradual transition to instruction in three languages – Kazakh, Russian, and English by 2020. While three languages are mentioned in the official policy document, the real intent seems to be focused on the promotion of the use of Kazakh and English, which are currently in disadvantageous positions compared to Russian. The new reform will be implemented at all secondary schools in Kazakhstan.

At this point, some of the schools in Kazakhstan, such as Daryn schools for gifted students, Kazakh-Turkish lyceums as well as Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools have already started to introduce tri-lingual education in pilot or experimental modes. However, the development of the new curricula and outcome indicators for the policy initiative are undertaken without data-based understanding of the current situation with language use among school children. Meanwhile, without such an understanding the practical efforts of implementing the new initiative may turn fruitless or less successful. The lack of empirical understanding about the patterns of language use among school students in Kazakhstan, which can be used in language and education policy decisions was the main rationale for conducting the study.

## 2. Literature Review

Prior to this study, limited research was conducted on the topic of language use in Kazakhstan, and language use among school children in particular. In one of the earlier studies, Fierman (2006) explored the patterns of language use in urban schools with mixed instruction in two languages and expressed a concern with the fact that students in these schools tended to use Russian outside the classroom, which might have a negative effect on the promotion and maintenance of the Kazakh language. He argued that policy-makers should separate classes with instruction in Kazakh from classes with instruction in Russian into separate schools as a more effective language policy measure.

Smagulova (2008) assessed the impact of earlier Kazakhization policies on language attitudes and use by examining the results of a large-scale self-report survey conducted in Kazakhstan in 2005-2007. The paper, however, was looking at the language use and attitudes of adult speakers rather than school-age children. The main findings of the survey with respect to language use were that Russian kept its status as a dominant language of communication across all domains. Its dominance was particularly characteristic of more affluent urban population. Smagulova also indicated that more respondents from the younger age group reported using Kazakh for interpersonal communication and literacy activities and that an increased preponderance to use Kazakh in private domains was more typical of Kazakh ethnicity.

In a more recent study, Smagulova (2016) presented the results of a survey, which contained a section exploring language use among speakers of different ages including school children. Similarly to the earlier study, this study revealed that Russian continued to dominate as the most frequently used language in many spheres of everyday communication in Kazakhstan. Smagulova also found that Kazakh was used more frequently among younger generations than among older generations, which could be explained by the more aggressive Kazakh-supporting language policies in independent Kazakhstan. In addition to that, she pointed out that teachers tended to report greater use of Kazakh in professional settings than individuals representing other occupations thus making school an important player in the promotion of the use of Kazakh.

Similar studies on language use in general and language use among school-children were conducted on the topic in other post-Soviet countries (Goodman & Lyulkun, 2010; Korth, 2005; Kulyik, 2007). In the development of the survey instrument for this study we relied extensively on a study by Goodman and Lyulkun (2010), which is the only study focused exclusively on language use and attitudes among school children. In their study, the authors explored language attitudes towards and usage of Ukrainian, Russian and English among university students in Central Ukraine. The survey revealed that while Russian and Ukrainian continue to be used on equal terms in the region, Ukrainian received greater symbolic support, while English was gaining greater influence in the domains of international business and travel.

As it is clear from the overview of the existing literature, little is known about the present-day patterns of language use among Kazakhstani school children. While several studies were conducted on the topic in the past, they either explored the situation more than a decade ago (Fierman, 2006) or looked at the patterns of language use for various age groups with only limited attention devoted to the school-age population (Smagulova, 2016). Meanwhile, as the government is transitioning to educational trilingualism and is promoting not only a more extensive use of Kazakh, but also of English at schools, an exploration of school-age children's language use tendencies is more than overdue in Kazakhstan. This study intends to fill the gap in the existing literature and to contribute to better understanding of the situation with language use among school children, which may be useful for researchers of language policy and language situation in post-Soviet contexts, as well as for language and education policy-makers in Kazakhstan.

The purpose of this study, the data for which was collected prior to introduction of the official trilingual education policy (in 2014) on a country-scale, was to shed light on the state of language use among secondary urban school students in Kazakhstan prior to the transition to three-language instruction, in particular, to explore the differences in language use among students receiving instruction in Russian, and those exposed to instruction in Kazakh. The main research questions

of the study are: (1) How languages (Kazakh, Russian and English) are used by school students in Kazakhstan across various contexts and media? (2) How does the use differ between students by medium of instruction? The study was expected to contribute both to research on language policy in Kazakhstan as well as to help policy makers and practitioners in making decisions regarding introduction of tri-lingual education.

### **3. Method**

The study used a survey design to answer the research questions. The target population was all youth of high school age in urban locations in Kazakhstan. Due to the small scale of the unfunded exploratory study, it was impossible to draw a large and highly representative sample, which would involve participants from different cities and various types of schools. Therefore, the survey was conducted only in Astana, which had been attracting massive numbers of migrants from other cities of Kazakhstan since it had become a capital in 1997. In some ways, Astana schools, which educate the children of recent migrants some of whom arrived within the last two of three years, represent urban school students from the whole of Kazakhstan. These students have diverse language skills, language attitudes and patterns of language use. This unique nature of Astana context allowed us to make an assumption that a survey of language use patterns among high-school students in Astana may reveal tendencies common for the rest of Kazakhstan.

#### **3.1. Participants**

We utilized a complex multi-stage stratified sampling approach to select our participants. School sites were first purposefully identified in Astana. We selected three public comprehensive schools, which possessed a diversified mix of students based on such characteristics as gender, parental income, level of education, central urban or suburban residence, primary tongue, and etc. No private, mono-lingual or specialized schools were included in the study. Then within each school students from 11th grade with different languages of instruction (Kazakh or Russian) were separated into two different groups. A random sample was drawn from each of the groups with the size of the random sample being consistent with the proportion of speakers of the corresponding language in a specific school population. The decision to conduct the survey among eleven graders was driven by the assumption that high school students would be able to comprehend the questions in the survey, while students of middle grades may not necessarily be able to fully understand all of the questions.

The sampling frame used in the survey distribution included 102 entries. Parental consent was given for 80 of the students and only 76 students agreed to complete the survey. Out of the total of 76 students, 46% were males and 54% were females. Fifty six percent of the participants were from classes with the Russian language of instruction, while 44% were from the classes with the Kazakh language of instruction. The sample was over-represented for students of Kazakh ethnicity. Sixty one percent of students indicated that both of their parents were ethnic Kazakhs. About a half of the students noted that their parents originated from rural areas. Finally, about twelve percent of the participants indicated that they live together with at least one of the grandparents.

In several important respects the sample is similar to the general population of children in Kazakhstan, where there is a majority of Ethnic Kazakhs (63% according to Index Mundi 2018) with relatively equal representation of sexes (male 2,374,427 vs. female 2,434,212 among 0-14 year old according to Index Mundi 2018) and a significant proportion of rural population (53.5% of urban population according to Index Mundi 2018) and where many ethnically Kazakh young families live together with their elderly.

#### **3.2. Instrument and Procedure**

The data was collected with a closed-ended survey which was administered to students on paper after obtaining principal's, parental and student' consents. The survey was based on an instrument used in Central Ukraine by Goodman and Lyulkun (2007). The instrument contained five

sections with five types of questions. First, demographic information about the participants was collected to identify characteristics of the sample. Specifically, we collected information about the language of instruction, gender, school attended, and parental background. Second, respondents were asked about the languages that they use at home, school, business, and social domains, as well as the languages used with them by other people in the same domains. The students had to choose one of the possible responses with respect to language use: "Always Kazakh", "More often Kazakh than Russian", "Sometimes Kazakh, Sometimes Russian", "More often Russian than Kazakh", "Always Russian", "Another Language" and "I cannot answer". The internal consistency of the survey part using the Likert Scale was assessed with SPSS by computing Cronbach's alpha. The alpha coefficient was equal to 0.65, which is considered an acceptable level of reliability. The Third, students were asked to indicate all languages, from the list of "Russian", "Kazakh", "English", and "Other", that they use across various media domains, such as television, books, newspapers, the Internet, and music. Fourth, students were offered a set of statements assessing their attitudes towards specific languages and their futures in Kazakhstan. Finally, the participants were asked several open-ended questions. Specifically, they were asked which language they think would be commonly used in Kazakhstan within 25 years period. They were also asked about their feelings in this regard. For the purposes of this paper we used only data collected from the first three groups of questions. Language attitudes data could not be included in this paper because of space limitations and will be analyzed in a separate paper in the future.

The responses to the closed-ended questions were collected with a response scale, on which students were requested to indicate one or several of the suggested choices. The responses were coded and entered into an Excel sheet. The data was analyzed descriptively using frequency counts and cross-tabulations. Simple tables and charts were generated to provide a visual representation of the situation with language use.

#### 4. Results

This section presents the results of the survey in the form of data tables and a summary of the main observations from the tables. The results are offered according to two types of participants – those from schools with Kazakh (44 participants) and those from schools with Russian as languages of instruction (32 participants). Since some students did not provide answers to each of the questions on the survey, the percentages of missing data for each item are also given in separate columns. The average per-item non-response rate was 5% with the highest number of missing responses being 15% on several items.

Table 1 shows the findings on how students from Kazakh-language classes use languages with their relatives, teachers, peers, and non-related individuals outside their family and schools. This table clearly shows that over 50% of students from Kazakh-speaking classes speak exclusively Kazakh with their parents and grand-parents, which could be both due to the fact that the parents are most likely predominantly Kazakh-speaking, but also due to the efforts of the parents to impose a strict mono-lingual language policy in the effort to maintain the Kazakh-language ability of their children. At the same time, students in this group use exclusively Kazakh to a lesser extent with their siblings and other relatives and even less frequently with individuals outside their immediate family, such as friends from school and outside the school, as well as shop assistants in the market and in stores.

Despite the tendency of students in the Kazakh-language-instruction group to use some Russian with siblings, peers and outsiders, for students enrolled in Kazakh-speaking classes Kazakh remains the primary, even if not exclusive, language of communication with siblings, peers, and other relatives. Only 14%, 7%, 25% and 27% of respondents indicated that they either use exclusively Russian or more often Russian than other languages with siblings, other relatives, friends at school and friends outside of school correspondingly.

Teachers play an important role in promoting the use of Kazakh in the group of students, since almost 90% of students indicated that they use mostly or exclusively Kazakh in their communication with teachers, which can be a result of teachers' expectations and exclusive instructional and non-



instructional use of Kazakh with students as a deliberate policy.

Table 1. *Language(s) Respondents Speak with Other(s) by Relationship and Context in Schools with Instruction in Kazakh*

|                           | Always Kazakh | More often Kazakh than Russian | Sometimes Kazakh, sometimes Russian | More often Russian than Kazakh | Always Russian | Another language | I cannot answer | Missing data |
|---------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Father                    | 52            | 7                              | 16                                  | 5                              | 5              | 0                | 0               | 15           |
| Mother                    | 57            | 9                              | 23                                  | 7                              | 5              | 0                | 0               | 0            |
| Grandparents              | 77            | 11                             | 2                                   | 0                              | 2              | 0                | 5               | 3            |
| Siblings                  | 45            | 9                              | 27                                  | 9                              | 5              | 0                | 0               | 5            |
| Other relatives           | 50            | 9                              | 30                                  | 5                              | 2              | 0                | 0               | 4            |
| Friends at school         | 32            | 14                             | 30                                  | 20                             | 5              | 0                | 0               | 0            |
| Friends outside of school | 30            | 14                             | 30                                  | 18                             | 9              | 0                | 0               | 0            |
| Teachers                  | 80            | 7                              | 9                                   | 2                              | 0              | 0                | 0               | 2            |
| Store sellers             | 39            | 14                             | 20                                  | 14                             | 2              | 2                | 2               | 7            |
| Market sellers            | 39            | 14                             | 20                                  | 14                             | 2              | 2                | 2               | 7            |

Note: in percent from N=44.

Table 2 shows the distribution of language use preferences among students who attend classes with Russian as the main language of instruction. One can see that there is much more variability in language use in this group of respondents. The grandparents in this group of students no longer play as a decisive role in promoting the use of Kazakh. Only 19% of students in this group communicate with their grandparents exclusively in Kazakh and only 9% use it as the main language of communication. This may occur due to two different reasons. On the one hand, this group contains more non-Kazakh ethnicities who are predominantly, if not exclusively, Russian-speaking. On the other hand, some of the ethnically Kazakh grand-parents in this group are bilinguals, while their responding grand-children are predominantly Russian-speaking with a limited Kazakh-language ability. Therefore, grandparents in this group may be enforcing Kazakh-language use policy more leniently than the ones in the previous group.

Another important observation here is that a very small percentage of students in this group speak exclusively Kazakh with parents at home. Only 3% of respondents indicated the use of exclusively Kazakh with fathers, while none of the students indicated the use of only or mostly Kazakh with their mothers. For the majority of the families that these students represent, the main language of communication with parents is Russian, which is spoken exclusively or most commonly (53% in case of fathers and 62% in case of mothers). Similar tendencies are observed with respect to the use of languages in communication with teachers. Meanwhile, the tendency to communicate in Russian is even more prominent in situations, when the respondents interact with peers or siblings.

A notable difference between students in this group with students in the previous group is greater use of languages other than Russian and Kazakh. Interestingly, parents rather than grandparents seem to play the main role in the promotion of non-dominant languages with 6% of students indicating that they use a third language in communication with their mothers and fathers. Due to our omission, we failed to include a separate item asking about the use of English,

hence, the proportion of students indicating the use of other languages may include both those who represent ethnic minorities, as well as those, whose parents may be pushing English at home. The fact that grandparents play a more important role in communication in the third language can be due to the fact that parents (rather than grandparents) tend to know English and push it at home or due to the fact that the minority children can be from ethnically mixed parents, where only one of the parents and one set of grandparents may represent an ethnic minority and may be able to speak the corresponding minority language. Unfortunately, the wording of the questions in the questionnaire does not allow us to distinguish between the potential reasons.

Table 2. *Language(s) Respondents Speak with Other(s) by Relationship and Context in Schools with Instruction in Russian*

|                                 | Always<br>Kazakh | More<br>often<br>Kazakh<br>than<br>Russian | Sometimes<br>Kazakh,<br>sometimes<br>Russian | More<br>often<br>Russian<br>than<br>Kazakh | Always<br>Russian | Another<br>lan-<br>guage | I<br>cannot<br>answer | Missing<br>Data |
|---------------------------------|------------------|--|--|--|-------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Father                          | 3                | 3  | 19   | 25   | 28                | 6                        | 9                     | 7               |
| Mother                          | 0                | 9  | 22   | 28   | 34                | 6                        | 0                     | 1               |
| Grandpar-<br>ents               | 19               | 9  | 19   | 16   | 25                | 3                        | 6                     | 3               |
| Siblings                        | 3                | 0  | 16   | 22   | 53                | 0                        | 3                     | 3               |
| Other rela-<br>tives            | 6                | 3  | 22   | 34   | 28                | 3                        | 3                     | 1               |
| Friends at<br>school            | 0                | 0  | 6  | 31   | 53                | 3                        | 3                     | 4               |
| Friends<br>outside of<br>school | 0                | 0  | 13   | 31   | 47                | 3                        | 3                     | 3               |
| Teachers                        | 0                | 3  | 16   | 44   | 38                | 0                        | 0                     | 0               |
| Store<br>sellers                | 2                | 0  | 27   | 28   | 25                | 3                        | 0                     | 15              |
| Market<br>sellers               | 39               | 14   | 20   | 14   | 2                 | 2                        | 2                     | 7               |

Note: in percent from N=32.

Table 3 shows findings describing the choice of languages that various individuals use in communication with the students who responded to the survey and who represented classes with Kazakh as the language of instruction. The distributions in this table are rather similar to the ones in Table 1, which point to the fact that students in this group tend to match the language that is chosen by the corresponding groups of individuals that they communicate with. There is a notable difference in the use of languages with relatives. Assuming that most of the children in this group come from predominantly Kazakh-speaking families, it can be expected that the extended families are also mostly Kazakh-speaking. However, we can see that only 43% of students indicated that their relatives use exclusively Kazakh in communication with them, while 50% of the students indicated that they themselves use exclusively Kazakh in communication with other relatives. This somewhat supports our earlier point that exclusive use of Kazakh could be predominantly the effect of strict language policy in the immediate family, where grandparents may also play an important role in language maintenance. This policy may be more difficult to impose in extended families with increasing possibilities of individuals not being predominantly Kazakh speakers being included in the family.

Table 3. *Languages Others Speak with Respondents from Schools with Instruction in Kazakh by Relationship and Context*

|                           | Always Kazakh | More often Kazakh than Russian | Sometimes Kazakh, sometimes Russian | More often Russian than Kazakh | Always Russian | Another language | I cannot answer | Missing data |
|---------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Father                    | 57            | 9                              | 14                                  | 7                              | 2              | 0                | 0               | 11           |
| Mother                    | 57            | 14                             | 20                                  | 7                              | 2              | 0                | 0               | 0            |
| Grandparents              | 77            | 16                             | 0                                   | 0                              | 0              | 0                | 5               | 2            |
| Siblings                  | 43            | 16                             | 20                                  | 11                             | 5              | 0                | 0               | 5            |
| Other relatives           | 43            | 18                             | 27                                  | 7                              | 2              | 0                | 0               | 3            |
| Friends at school         | 20            | 14                             | 39                                  | 20                             | 5              | 0                | 0               | 2            |
| Friends outside of school | 25            | 11                             | 36                                  | 18                             | 7              | 0                | 0               | 3            |
| Teachers                  | 80            | 9                              | 9                                   | 0                              | 2              | 0                | 0               | 0            |
| Store sellers             | 23            | 23                             | 36                                  | 14                             | 5              | 0                | 0               | 0            |
| Market sellers            | 32            | 16                             | 34                                  | 5                              | 11             | 2                | 1               | 0            |

Note: in percent from N=44.

Table 4 shows the use of languages by various individuals with students from classes with Russian as the language of instruction. The key observation here is that the extent to which parents, grandparents and other relatives use predominantly or exclusively Kazakh with students in this group is greater than the extent to which the students use predominantly or exclusively Kazakh with the corresponding groups of individuals. For example, 19% of students indicated that they use only Kazakh in conversations with their grandparents, while 25% of students indicated that their grandparents use exclusively Kazakh when addressing them. Similarly, none of the students mentioned that they use only Kazakh in communication with their mothers, while 6% of students indicated that mothers use only Kazakh to address them. To summarize, there may be a generational “dilution” effect in Kazakh speaking families who chose to send their children to Russian-language classes: children speak the Kazakh language to a lesser extent than their parents do.

In addition to that, we continue to see the previously observed tendency with respect to the use of non-majority languages. Various members of the family and outsiders are more likely to speak third languages with students in classes with Russian as the language of instruction than in classes with Kazakh language of instruction, which tend to be exclusively bi-lingual.



Table 4. Languages Others Speak with Respondents from Schools with Instruction in Russian by Relationship and Context

|                                 | Always<br>Kazakh | More<br>often<br>Kazakh<br>than Rus-<br>sian | Sometimes<br>Kazakh,<br>sometimes<br>Russian | More<br>often<br>Russian<br>than<br>Kazakh | Always<br>Russian | Another<br>language | I<br>cannot<br>answer | Missing<br>data |
|---------------------------------|------------------|--|--|--|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Father                          | 3                | 13   | 16   | 31   | 19                | 6                   | 6                     | 6               |
| Mother                          | 6                | 13   | 22   | 34   | 19                | 6                   | 0                     | 0               |
| Grandpar-<br>ents               | 25               | 9  | 25   | 13   | 19                | 3                   | 3                     | 3               |
| Siblings                        | 6                | 0  | 25   | 25   | 34                | 6                   | 3                     | 1               |
| Other rela-<br>tives            | 6                | 3  | 28   | 28   | 25                | 6                   | 3                     | 1               |
| Friends at<br>school            | 0                | 0  | 6  | 56   | 38                | 0                   | 0                     | 0               |
| Friends<br>outside of<br>school | 9                | 0  | 0  | 47   | 34                | 3                   | 3                     | 4               |
| Teachers                        | 0                | 6  | 25   | 50   | 17                | 3                   | 0                     | 0               |
| Store sellers                   | 6                | 9  | 38   | 25   | 19                | 3                   | 0                     | 0               |
| Market<br>sellers               | 9                | 13   | 34   | 22   | 16                | 3                   | 3                     | 0               |

Note: in percent from N=32.

Table 5 shows results describing language use across various contexts among students from classes with Kazakh as the language of instruction. With some minor exceptions (use of emails), Kazakh plays a secondary role in communication across various media and contexts. Russian is the main language used by students from Kazakh-language classes in watching TV, listening to the radio, when reading books and periodicals, and while web surfing. More importantly, English has become the primarily language in which students listen to the music and communicate with English-language tutors. Outside the context of formal instruction and communication with family members the only other context in which these students refer predominantly to the use of Kazakh is subject tutoring.

Table 5. Languages Respondents from Schools with Instruction in Kazakh Primarily Use by Medium or Context

|   | Kazakh | Russian | English | Other | I cannot answer |
|---|--------|---------|---------|-------|-----------------|
| Watching TV                               | 39     | 48      | 5       | 0     | 0               |
| Listening to radio                        | 20     | 27      | 9       | 0     | 0               |
| Listening to mp3s (music)                 | 23     | 23      | 45      | 2     | 0               |
| Reading books and periodi-<br>cals        | 34     | 41      | 7       | 0     | 0               |
| Sending SMS messages                      | 32     | 43      | 5       | 0     | 0               |
| Sending emails                            | 32     | 30      | 18      | 0     | 0               |
| Surfing the Internet                      | 0      | 57      | 7       | 0     | 0               |
| Communication with<br>non-language tutors | 61     | 16      | 9       | 0     | 0               |
| Communication with En-<br>glish tutor     | 16     | 18      | 41      | 0     | 2               |

Note: N=44.

Table 6 shows the patterns of language use across various contexts and media among students from classes with Russian as the language of instruction. The patterns of using languages are very similar to the previous group for students in this group. Russian remains the main language used in communication in various domains. However, its role is less important in web surfing. Interestingly, students in this group indicated greater use of Kazakh in web surfing than students in the Kazakh-language group. This could be explained by the fact that students in this group may have to refer to the use of Kazakh-language internet in preparation for classes in Kazakh in the absence of good print resources on the Kazakh language. Another difference from the previous group is in the use of Russian and English in communication with English language tutors. Given that most English-language instructors tend to be Russian speakers and methodological literature on English language instruction is available in Russian, it is not surprising that students from Russian-language classes are more likely to use Russian in communication with their language tutors than their peers from Kazakh-language schools who may face difficulties in finding Kazakh-speaking English language tutors.

Table 6. *Languages Respondents from Schools with Instruction in Russian Use by Medium or Context*

|  | Kazakh | Russian | English | Other | I cannot answer |
|--|--------|---------|---------|-------|-----------------|
| Watching TV                            | 19     | 46      | 3       | 1     | 2               |
| Listening to radio                     | 12     | 22      | 11      | 0     | 5               |
| Listening to mp3s (music)              | 10     | 24      | 36      | 3     | 1               |
| Reading books and periodicals          | 18     | 43      | 5       | 0     | 0               |
| Sending SMS messages                   | 16     | 47      | 3       | 0     | 1               |
| Sending emails                         | 16     | 33      | 17      | 2     | 0               |
| Surfing the Internet                   | 8      | 50      | 6       | 1     | 0               |
| Communication with non-language tutors | 29     | 30      | 9       | 0     | 2               |
| Communication with English tutor       | 7      | 33      | 0       | 0     | 3               |

Note: N=32.

## 5. Discussion

One of the main findings from the study is that Russian continues to play an important place in the portfolio of languages used by urban school students from mixed-language schools in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. This finding is consistent with prior studies on the topic conducted by Fierman (2006) and Smagulova (2008, 2016). Outside the class-room settings and beyond communication with immediate family members, even students receiving education in Kazakh tend to use Russian as an alternate or the main language of communication. This finding is consistent with the argument made by Fierman (2006), who also pointed to the fact that in mixed urban schools in particular, Russian remains the main language of communication among school children, thus presenting a major challenge to the promotion and maintenance of Kazakh.

Meanwhile, only a small proportion of students in classes with Russian as the language of instruction speak Kazakh as the only or the primary language with immediate family members, including grandparents. Apparently, families for whom Kazakh remains the main language of communication tend to impose a strict mono-lingual language policy at home and also tend to send their children to Kazakh-language classes trying to maintain their children's ability to use Kazakh as the main language. There is much more variability in family language policies in case of parents sending their children to schools with Russian as the language of instruction. While large proportion of families seem to be emphasizing Kazakh in communication with their children, about half of the families choose to use two languages or to use Russian.

Another important finding refers to the choice of languages in different media and contexts.

Across a variety of modern media, importantly music, TV, and Internet, students in both groups of language instruction prefer Russian and English over Kazakh. On the one hand, this is, probably, related to the dominance of the Western and Russia popular culture in the region, as well as their greater presence on the web (Mingisheva, 2013). On the other hand, this can be related to the lack of age-appropriate content in Kazakh on the Internet (Share America, 2018), which makes students choose to use the content available in two other languages.

The two findings have some important implications for trilingual education policy. One can predict that students will have better opportunities to learn Russian than to learn Kazakh under the existing patterns of language use. On the one hand, there seems to be already an inclination of students in Kazakh-speaking classes to use Russian outside their immediate family. As they face greater hours of instruction in Russian, their predisposition to use Russian with siblings, friends, and other unrelated individuals may increase. This likelihood will increase even more with the removal of separation between classes with two different languages of instruction. As trilingual education policy is introduced in schools, such a separation will be unnecessary. Children will inevitably mingle with one another during breaks and recesses and regardless of the primary language they use at home. They will mostly end up using Russian in non-instructional communication, as it happens already, even with separation maintained, within mixed language schools (Fierman, 2008).

In addition to that, as all students become more proficient in Russian and English, they will most likely rely on the two languages when using a variety of modern media, including TV, music, and Internet, in which content is broadly available. While students' proficiency in Kazakh can be expected to increase as a result of using Kazakh in instruction of some of the subjects and students may be motivated to explore some of the content in that language, the content, unfortunately, may not be available. In its turn, the lack of opportunities to experience the Kazakh language across a variety of contexts can be predicted to lead to a decrease in motivation to learn the language and in lower than targeted language proficiency.

An important observation refers to the use of languages in the process of language tutoring. Apparently, students from groups with Kazakh as the language of instruction rely predominantly on English when using the services of language tutors, while students from groups with Russian as the language of instruction rely mostly on Russian. This fact can be explained by the lack of Kazakh-speaking specialists in the English language, which makes students from Kazakh classes rely on Russian-speaking tutors and use English as a means of communication. The lack of access to help in the primary language may put students from Kazakh-speaking classes at the disadvantaged position with respect to English proficiency, but at the same time can make their transition to instruction in English somewhat easier since they have already experienced such instruction in case of language learning.

## 6. Conclusion

Overall, the study identified some interesting patterns of language use among school children in Kazakhstan, which can be used in informing current policy of using language in education. The continuing dominance of Russian may create challenges for maintenance of Kazakh in trilingual schools, which will not distinguish between classes with instruction in Russian and Kazakh. The tendency of Kazakh-speaking children to use Russian in communication with peers may lead to gradual disappearance of Kazakh as the language of communication at schools outside of classrooms. Code switching to Russian by teachers, who will have to teach in English may also increase the use of Russian as the language of instruction.

There were some major limitations to the method used in the study. The survey was conducted in one school in Astana and the sample size was relatively small. Caution should be used when trying to generalize the results to the overall population of Kazakhstani students. Further studies with larger and more representative samples are necessary. In addition, it would be important to explore future developments in language use as the trilingual education policy is introduced to test the suggested predictions and to develop a better understanding of the situation as it unfolds.

Three important implications arise from the findings of this study for language policy

makers, educators, and parents. First, and most importantly, if policy makers truthfully intend to promote the use of the Kazakh language equally with the use of Russian and English as a result of implementation of trilingual education policy, significant effort should be made to develop age appropriate content for school students in the Kazakh language, especially on TV and the Internet. Current effort of policy makers tends to focus on the development of textbooks and instructional electronic media. However, in case of contemporary generations of school children, most of the learning is self-guided and happens outside the classroom, as a result of Internet-surfing and communication with peers. Educators' role is expected to transform to that of facilitators, who can direct and structure the effort of the students in the process of independent or collaborative learning. Therefore, development of textbooks and instructional media is not sufficient. Whether policy makers have the financial resources and access to technical expertise to develop other types of content is under the question.

Second, parents and educators should realize an important role played by immediate family and peers in maintaining the use of a particular language. If parents and grandparents remain the main players with whom students of Kazakh ethnicity continue to use Kazakh, parents may consider maintaining stricter monolingual language policies at home, forcing their children to use the language at home. While both parents and educators have a lower control over the choice of students to use Kazakh with peers, schools may introduce certain rules regulating language behavior during recesses to promote the use of Kazakh during non-instructional time at school.

Finally, prior studies demonstrated that due to their own and students' limited ability to use English in instruction, many teachers code-switched in the process of teaching in English at the early stages of introduction of trilingual education in Kazakhstan (Mussagali, 2018). If there is lack of Kazakh-speaking instructors able to speak English, this may put students with Kazakh as the primary language of communication at a disadvantaged position in terms of both English language and subject learning. If teachers were not able to explain problematic topics to them in Kazakh, they would lack sufficient understanding of both concepts and terminology in the subject, which is taught in English. This points out the importance of increasing English-language ability of subject teachers who are currently teaching in Kazakh, as well as the importance of increasing the number of teachers who are proficient in both English and Kazakh.

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