**LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION**

**ENGLISH AS THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION: MODERN TENDENCY OF EDUCATION IN KAZAKHSTAN**

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**ABSTRACT:** Joining of Kazakhstan to the Bologna three-cycle system increased significantly the number of programs taught in English language. There are about 40 universities which have special groups, where English is used as the medium of instruction and it makes more than 30% from total educational program. Quantity of the Bachelor, Master and PhD programs are growing dramatically. Some universities see an opportunity to attract a wider range of students or feel that EMI strengthens offer to those students who believe studying in English will make them more employable. EMI can be seen as a threat to the status and development of the local language. On the other hand, EMI can also be treated as an opportunity. This article offers review of issues related with applying EMI in Kazakhstan HEIs.

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**Introduction**

Reformation of higher education system in Kazakhstan considers the quality of specialists focusing on integration to national and world economy. Therefore, the adoption of English as the medium of instruction (EMI) appears as the one of the most leading tendency in Bachelor, Master and PhD educational programs in the country. At the same time Kazakh and Russian languages are widely used. In recent years the higher education institutions obtained broad experience and various innovative pedagogical methods are investigated to promote competitive specialists.

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At the same time, there are still vexed points dealing with deliberated issues: national identification of special education in response to global integration, integration of education and business systems, assessment tools of quality and give assurance of the continued long term viability of educational industry in different spheres of economy and society.

**Modern conditions of EMI in Kazakhstan**

Due to implication of the Bologna three-cycle system, which is mainly completed in 2010, the number of English-language programs in non-English speaking countries increased dramatically. According to the data from the Institute of International Education, master programs taught entirely in English have increased during from 560 in 2002 to 3701 in 2011 (Dearden, 2014). As a member of the global market, Kazakhstan has also been under tremendous pressure from this trend towards academic internationalization. In the last decade, higher education in Kazakhstan has undergone a period of remarkable change and growth. There are 42 universities which have special groups, where English used as the medium of instruction.

*Why is EMI growing?* Some universities see an opportunity to attract a wider range of students; or they feel that EMI strengthens their offer to those students who believe studying in English will make them more employable in a world where a quarter of the population speaks English. Another reason is that European higher education policy (several of interexchange programs) and the Erasmus programme opens in a new tab or window. In most countries around the world the English provides a major impact on student mobility. For last several years exchange students programs are axiomatic in Kazakhstan educational market.

English as the medium of instruction in Kazakhstan cannot be considered separately from the environment where it is developing:

- Knowledge of English is determined as a basic condition for increasing practical and professional skills of specialists on international markets;
- The role of English language is accepted as a language of international communication on the same line with Kazakh (state) and Russian (interethnic);
- English is being learned from primary schools with pursuing in higher schools and institutions;
- Conceptual basis is elaborated to implement international standards of learning English at schools and universities;
- New pedagogical and modern technologies are being developed.

**Current issues of EMI in Kazakhstan**

EMI in Kazakhstan is characterized with many challenges and problems. There is no common methodological support (state standard programs) which makes optional sampling of educational materials by universities. Higher educational institutes involve into growing number of innovative experiments. Lack of professional personnel makes up more declension. These and other issues and circumstances affect on quality of young generation of specialists.

The question is whether the students concentrate on learning the academic subject or on improving their English. According to research carried out at al-Farabi Kazakh National University, most students, though their understanding of lectures was not high, agreed that instruction in English helped them to improve their English proficiency. On the same time, the students mentioned that they were skeptical.
about the introduction of English-medium higher education because of the ability and motivation of teachers and students.

Although courses taught in English are on the rise, there are challenges related to teaching and learning process. One of the issues is that the lecturer’s English, although good, may not be specialized enough. There are further issues, such as the difficulty of assessing examination answers written in English since we might ask what is really being tested - the English language or knowledge of the subject? We should also ask whether the lecturer’s role has changed from that of a specialist in his or her discipline to that of a specialist in his or her discipline who can deliver in a second language. Some lecturers feel that their role is not to help students with their English, but simply to deliver their subject in English. When asked about their role, one university respondent said: “I’m not interested in the students English; I’m interested in their competency”. However, another said: “I probably will not help their spoken English, but I hope to give them more confidence and understanding when reading”.

This leads us questioning to what extent an academic teacher lecturing in English can or should also become a quasi-English language teacher and take time explaining specialist English vocabulary and grammar. The EMI challenge them to present their subject clearly and concisely in another language. The students’ view of the lecturer can also change when EMI is introduced. Research has shown that students’ perceptions of lecturers’ English language proficiency correlated with their view of lecturers’ general competence.

There are several problems with EMI implementation in Kazakhstan:
- Language problems: entering exams, functional lexis, lecturers’ competencies;
- Culture problems: diverse contingent, lecturers’ burden, americanization of education programs for Asian lecturers’ and students;
- Differences in higher education management;
- Lack of literature for some courses in English;
- Lack of professional trainings for non-English speakers, who teaches in English.

EMI can be seen as a threat to the status and development of the local language. On the other hand, EMI can also be treated as an opportunity. At a related policy dialogue in Segovia, Spain, last year, participants almost unilaterally agreed that EMI provided an opportunity. Many governments are now identifying new recruitment opportunities for their country’s education institutions through EMI, and at a pedagogical level, students, lecturers and institutions see the benefits of the international dimension EMI brings. It is considered that EMI has the following advantages:
- Improving English;
- Full participation in international communication;
- Better preparation for the competitive labor market achieving professional goals in Kazakhstan and abroad;
- Enabling foreign students to enroll;
- Helping university get better rating;
- The reason to develop professional trainings for non-English speakers, who teaches in English.

Overall, although the students (respondents of the research) in this study generally did not think that they had a high level of comprehension of their EMI lectures, most of them at least did not show negative attitudes towards the courses, probably due to their professors’ various efforts in reducing their anxiety level in the classroom. Moreover, while the effects of English-medium instruction on the learning of subject
content remain unclear, most of the students surveyed agreed that English instruction helped them improve their English.

For universities that do not have sufficient resources to develop extended EMI practice, there are other strategies that can be useful. One option is to offer voluntary, non-credit-bearing EMI language courses that students pay for. Another option is offering EMI courses to only students who have sufficient proficiency in English and at the same time design their EMI curriculum with great caution. Although many Kazakhstani universities have invited experts to help how to teach content courses in English to Kazakhstani students, most of these discussions did not focus specifically on how to use the English language effectively in lectures.

Many questions remain today. Do non-native English speaking (NNS) students in different types of universities encounter different language problems in their EMI courses? What English language problems do NNS teachers encounter in their EMI courses? What are the effective strategies can be used by NNS teachers to improve their English instruction? Do NNS students with different English proficiency levels encounter different problems in EMI courses? Do NNS students at different education levels (e.g., graduate vs. undergraduate) react differently to English-medium instruction and encounter different types of problems in their EMI courses? These and other questions need to be thoroughly investigated in further research to develop proper and efficient approaches and tools in applying the EMI.

Conclusion

Each citizen of Kazakhstan must strive to know Kazakh as a state, Russian as an interethnic and English as international language to meet requirements and demands of contemporary life. To ensure the effective implementation of the idea multilingual strategy was elaborated. Establishing the Republican coordinating center of multilingual education is on process. There are several goals in order to implement a cultural project “The trinity of languages”, which calls for the increasing the role of Kazakh language as a state one, accepting high significance of Russian language and developing favorable conditions to master English language. Continuous and successive system of EMI stipulates ensemble management of education quality.

References

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