



Using the Mother Tongue in Foreign-Language Learning: Secondary School Students in Kazakhstan

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One of the notable behaviours of individuals during the teaching of foreign languages is the use of the first language as an integral part of the learning-teaching process. This situation can also negatively affect the learning of a foreign language. The aim of this study is to determine the reasons why secondary-school students in Kazakhstan feel the need to use their first language (Kazakh or Russian) in foreign-language classes where they are studying English. The research, based on the general screening model, was conducted in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, in three middle schools with a group of 296 11th grade students. The data was obtained by using an attitude scale consisting of four factors which was developed by Ocak, Kuru and Ozchalishan (2010). The scale factor-loads varied between 0.35-0.85; and reliability was found to be $\text{Alpha}=0.71$. According to the findings, students avoid the use of the foreign languages they study; have motivation problems; have a fear of being criticized by teachers; have a fear of being teased by classmates; tease their friends; and don't believe in themselves enough. It is therefore necessary to take measures to increase the self-confidence of students; and a more English-speaking environment should be established.

Keywords: native language, foreign language learning, English teaching, language learning attitude, EFL

INTRODUCTION

In our digital world, knowledge of a foreign language is an indispensable and basic lifeskill. In a time of globalisation, when the world may be regarded as a small village, learning foreign languages has become a necessity for individuals. That is why permanent investment should be made in foreign-language learning; and educational programs, methods and techniques should be developed and updated constantly.

The development of international communication; the success of the workforce in the international area; and indicators relating to the international value of post-graduate education and educational institutions are all directly connected with foreign-language

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competence (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015). For this reason, foreign-language teaching in developed countries is one of the important components of the education system.

Countries that want their citizens to have good foreign-language proficiency constantly improve their language teaching programs; pay special attention to teacher training; develop materials for this purpose; and try to design environments that facilitate language learning for students. Important steps have been taken in this direction in Kazakhstan.

Accordingly, the most important model in the field of teaching a foreign language (1991-2015), is aimed at "practical" language teaching instead of theoretical - that is, intercultural communication. In fact, the modern tendency for the further development of the foreign-language education system in Kazakhstan has tried to be taken into consideration (Sulkarnayeva, 2017).

In the education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan, especially in the post-independence period, important investments have been made in the learning of western languages, especially English as a FLT. The most important indicator of the success or failure of these investments is the learners' ability to use the foreign language they have learned. The Message from the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, N.A. Nazarbayev, 'The New Kazakhstan in the New World (2011), attempts to examine the factors behind and the basis of polylingual education in Kazakhstan; the problems of polylingual education in the country; the theoretical foundation of polylingual education; and the cultural project entitled 'The Unity of Three Languages' in the Republic of Kazakhstan. According to the Message, Kazakhstan must be accepted as a highly developed country where the population speaks three languages: Kazakh, Russian and English. (Nazarbayev, 2011). According to the strategies emphasised above, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan reduced the age of starting English learning to 6-7 years old in 2012 and made arrangements for it to be included in the primary curriculum (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015). Trilingual education has been piloted in a network of 33 schools for gifted children since 2007 (Daryn National Scientific-Practical Centre, 2012); and in seventeen Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools set up as pilot establishments for the development of a wider range of best educational practices as part of the ongoing national reform of education (Iyldyz, 2015).

From September 1, 2018, students in grades 3, 6 and 8 will begin learning the updated content. At the same time, a five-day academic week has been introduced. Preparations are also underway for transition to the study in English of four subjects in the natural sciences in the 10th and 11th grades from 2019 (Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Informatics). In the academic year 2017-2018, the teaching of natural sciences in English was introduced in 153 schools. The number of trilingual schools in Kazakhstan is intended to reach 700 (Iyldyz, 2015).

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan changed the State Educational Program for primary education and the curriculum for teaching English as a

third language (L3) to grades 1-4 in 2013. As with many changes in the curriculum, English-language teaching has also been changed and the starting age for learning English has been lowered to 6-7 years of age (Grade 1) (Zhetpisbayeva et al., 2015). The program of multilingual learning provides the creation of a new model of education that promotes the formation of a competitive generation in the context of globalization, which owns the language culture. Knowledge of the Kazakh, Russian and English languages will give to young people the key to world markets, science and new technologies; and will create the conditions for the formation of an ideological setting suited to constructive cooperation on the basis of initiation to ethnic, Kazakhstan and world cultures (Amangeldina, Alken, & Rahmetova, 2014). Moreover, trilingual education will also contribute the development of social awareness in Kazakhstan (Jantassova, 2014). According to state planning, it is aimed to increase the number of English-speaking citizens to 15% by 2020 (Baiteliyeva, 2015). There are many variables that affect success in foreign-language-learning environments. We can list a number of these: teaching methods and techniques; teacher qualifications; teaching materials; student motivation; and an environment for using the foreign language. One of the factors which effect students' success in learning foreign language is using the native language in the process of foreign language learning. According to the findings, students avoid using the foreign languages which they study; have problems of motivation; fear being criticized by teachers; fear being teased by classmates while themselves being involved in teasing; and do not believe in themselves enough.

There are some studies in Kazakhstan devoted to foreign language teaching and especially teaching English. One of these studies is an empirical study which studied the integration of English teaching in the programme of teaching in technical higher education according to the principle of trilingual education (Jantassova, 2014). A study of the nature of trilingual-education practice in Kazakhstan emphasizes the difficulties teachers have of being creative in terms of teaching foreign languages and the inadequacy of methods and materials for teaching the language (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015). This is the most important factor in increasing the tendency of students to use their native language while learning a foreign language.

According to the results of the study, there are not enough publications devoted to the use of the native language during the teaching of a foreign one. This study is important from the point of view of determining the reasons for using the native language during the learning of a foreign language in Kazakhstan; and accordingly proposals have been made which will hopefully decrease the tendency to use the native language in FL classes.

Purpose of the Study

The general aim of the study is to determine the reasons why secondary school students in Kazakhstan and specifically Astana use their native language while they are learning a foreign language (English). With this general aim in mind, the answers to the following questions have been researched:

1. What are the general opinions of the students in terms of the whole scale?
2. Is there a meaningful difference between the opinions of students according to their gender?

3. Is there a meaningful difference between the opinions of students according to their gender, considering the factors and items of the scale?

Limitations

The research is limited to the opinions of 80 voluntarily-participating students randomly selected from 296 students who were attending 11th grade at three middle schools in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan.

METHOD

The Research Model

The research was designed according to the scanning model. The scanning model aims to reveal the various features of a group as they exist (Buyukozturk at al., 2010: 16-17) According to the study, the 11th-grade students of three middle schools in Kazakhstan's capital city Astana who participated in the research were asked about using their mother tongue while learning a foreign language; and the relational screening model was used to compare opinions according to the independent variable.

Population and Sampling

The population of the research study was identified as three middle schools in Astana, Kazakhstan, which agreed to participate in the survey. **Sample of the research** 296 students who attended the 11th class in these schools; and among them 80 students who participated in the research voluntarily. Data collection tool were reached 296 students. But the data collection tool filled by 80 students has been accepted. Because some students did not want to participate in the research, some were not determined to save filling the data collection tool. As a result, 80 students formed the sample group. This is accepted as the limitation of the research. These students were identified by a simple random sampling method. The gender distribution of the students is shown in Table 1:

Table 1
Gender Distribution of Students

Gender	f	%
Male	44	55.00
Female	36	45.00
Total	80	100.00

It will be seen that the majority of the participants (44 individuals or 55% of the total) are male; and 36 individuals or 45% of the total are females.

Data Collection Tool

The data-collection tool was an attitude scale developed by Ocak, Kuru and Ozchalishan for measuring students' attitudes towards the reasons for using Turkish while learning a foreign language (English) in a preparatory class (Ocak, Kuru and Ozchalishan, 2010). The main purpose of this scale is to determine the reasons why students use their mother tongue in foreign-language classes. The scale consists of 24 items whose K.M.O. value is 0.67 and with factor loads varying between 0.35-0.85. The reliability of the scale was found to be Alpha=0.71 and consist of 4 factors. The scale was of the Likert type and the options were 'I totally agree' 4.21-5.00; 'I agree' 3.41-4.20; 'I can't decide' 2.61-3.40; 'I don't agree' 1.81-2.60; and 'I totally disagree' 1.00-1.80.

Data Analysis

Frequency (f) and percentage (%) techniques were used for the analysis of the gender of students participating in the study. When the whole scale is taken into consideration, a mean is used in interpreting the views of the students on each item. Independent groups t test was used to determine the differences between groups according to the gender of the students. The level of significance was set as 0.05.

FINDINGS

The results obtained in the study are discussed below.

General opinions of the students considering the whole scale.

According to this, the averages and standard deviations of student opinions on each view are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Reasons for Avoiding Speaking the Foreign Language (English) in the Class

Nr	Viewpoints	\bar{x}	Sd
1	I believe that course books don't assist us to improve speaking.	3.43	1.17
2	I believe that my English knowledge is adequate for listening but not for speaking.	2.85	1.24
3	I believe that English is a skill that I can only use at school.	2.28	1.40
4	I am anxious about being ridiculed as I speak.	2.80	1.15
5	I am offended by the teacher correction as I speak.	2.83	1.21
6	I am anxious about the possibility of mispronouncing English words.	3.43	1.19
7	By the time I finish preparatory program, I will start my department where the medium of instruction is Kazakh.	2.85	1.17
8	When I start my program, I can the must courses in English as a passive listener.	2.28	1.24
9	I think, in English I will not be able to express what I want to.	2.80	1.40
10	I believe, my previous negative experiences has built up prejudices against English.	2.78	1.19
11	I want to speak English in the class but as my friends are not enthusiastic, I give up.	2.85	1.26
12	My motivation in speaking English decreases because of absenteeism.	2.81	1.27
13	I believe that the best medium is the native tongue.	3.06	1.35
14	I believe that I have learned English but I am not ready to speak.	3.02	1.39
15	I abstain from the teacher's reaction if I make a mistake.	3.03	1.19
16	I cannot build English sentences.	2.62	1.22
17	I think that a level of success to pass the proficiency test is enough.	3.41	1.11
18	My vocabulary knowledge is not adequate for speaking.	2.92	1.30
19	I do not think that my English will improve by speaking with classmates.	2.61	1.07
20	It takes a longer time to express in English	3.01	1.23
21	As the lessons are entertaining, I get more disposed to speak English.	3.27	1.16
22	If I fulfil my assignments in time, I speak English more in the class.	3.33	1.29
23	If I do any pre-learning activity, I speak English more in the class.	3.28	1.33
24	I think the main objective of the program is to teach a general English, not to teach speaking.	3.42	1.40

A large number of students' opinions at the highest level of "agree" ($\bar{x} = 3.43$) were connected with their fear of bad pronunciation. Similarly, students' attitudes ($\bar{x} = 3.43$) demonstrated their view that textbooks did not improve speaking skills. The majority of students are unable to decide ($\bar{x} = 2.85$) whether their English knowledge is adequate for listening but not for speaking. Students do not agree that English is a skill which is only used at school. Students appear to believe in the importance in their daily life of having a knowledge of English ($\bar{x} = 2.28$). A large number of students are undecided in relation to the statement that by the time they finish the preparatory program, they will start in a department where the medium of instruction is Kazakh. ($\bar{x} = 2.85$). This shows that students may prefer native speakers of English to a native speaker of English. Furthermore, students don't agree that when they start the program they will be only a passive listener in the English courses ($\bar{x} = 2.28$), which refers to their belief in active participation in the English classes. In spite of this, students cannot decide whether they will be able to express what they want in English ($\bar{x} = 2.85$), where previous negative experiences have built up a prejudice against English ($\bar{x} = 2.78$); if there is any negative influence of their classmates in speaking ($\bar{x} = 2.85$); or if their own absenteeism decreases their motivation in speaking English ($\bar{x} = 2.81$). The students cannot be sure about whether the best medium is the native tongue ($\bar{x} = 3.06$); if they are ready to express what they have learned in English ($\bar{x} = 3.02$); whether they are able to build English sentences ($\bar{x} = 2.62$); whether their knowledge of vocabulary is adequate for speaking; and whether they abstain from the teacher's reaction in making mistakes. It can be said, however, that students think that "the main purpose of the program is not to teach speaking, but to teach general English"; and that "the current level of success is sufficient to pass a qualification examination for foreign language". It has been determined that students are ambivalent about the views presented to them in many dimensions (Item 17). These views can be summarized as follows: pupils are not sure about will be they able to speak fluently in English even if pupils do their homework on time and if they have pre-learning activities related to the course and if they have entertaining activities in the class. In other words, even if these activities are practised, they are unsure about whether will they influence their English- speaking skills.

The students' attitudes according to their answers have shown that the best learning environment is the environment in which the native language is used; they learn English, but are not ready to talk; it takes a long time to express themselves in English; their vocabulary is not enough for speaking; their English levels are sufficient for listening but not enough for speaking; and they are also hesitant to speak in English as they can not make correct sentences in English. They also argue that if they make a mistake they do not come up with a positive or negative opinion in terms of the teacher's reaction and corrective action; they want to speak in English, but because of the negative attitude of their friends they give up; and in other words it was determined that opinions expressing indecision were at the forefront.

Students have been accepted at the level of indecision by their belief that English will develop by talking to their classmates and that their motivation for speaking English is negatively affected if they are absent. It has also emerged that, in addition to all of these,

pupils will be passive listeners if they begin the English-language program and at that point do not agree with the viewpoint that English is a necessary skill only at school.

The opinions of students according to their gender

The opinions of the students were compared with the gender independent variables. In other words, it has been attempted to determine whether gender is an important variable for the students deciding to use a native language in learning foreign language. For this purpose, the normality of the distributions of the data were analysed by the Shapiro-Wilk test and the distribution was found to be normal (S-W (male) = 0,976; $p = 0,078 > 0,05$; S-W (female) = 0,972; $p = 0,098 > 0,05$). On the other hand, by Levene test which was used to determine the homogeneity of variances revealed that variance was homogeneous according to gender ($F = 0,036$; $p = 0,849 > 0,05$). Because parametric test conditions were provided for this reason, independent groups were analysed by t test. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Comparison of Opinions According to Gender with Independent Groups T Test

Gender	N	\bar{x}	Sd	df	t	P
Male	44	2.98	0.523	78	0.056	0.955
Female	36	2.98	0.488			

As can be seen, no statistically significant difference was found between males and females when their views were compared with the whole scale ($t(78)=0.056$; $p>0.05$). In other words, gender was not an important variable in terms of students' views, and both groups showed similar views. Accordingly, both groups expressed opinions at the level of indecision (neither agree nor disagree) in the context of the reasons for their tendency to use their mother tongue when learning foreign language (English) with a mean of $\bar{x} = 2.98$.

Gender-based comparisons of factors of the scale.

The scale used in the research consists of four factors. These are the dimensions of: a) lack of motivation, b) fear, c) lack of self-esteem, and d) readiness. The significant difference of views and opinions by gender were compared with independent groups t test. The obtained data are presented in Table 4.

The opinions of students according to their gender, considering the factors and items of the scale

Table 4

Comparison of Scale Sub-Dimensions with Independent Groups T Test

Dimensions	Gender	N	\bar{x}	Sd	df	t	P
Lack of motivation	Male	44	3.08	0.582	78	0.194	0.846
	Female	36	3.11	0.572			
Fear	Male	44	2.79	0.706	78	0.509	0.612
	Female	36	2.87	0.697			
Lack of self-esteem	Male	44	2.82	0.658	78	0.586	0.559
	Female	36	2.74	0.627			
Readiness dimensions	Male	44	3.34	0.780	78	0.088	0.930
	Female	36	3.33	0.743			

As can be seen, there is no significant difference between the views of the students according to their gender in all dimensions ($p > 0.05$). In other words, gender is not a significant variable according to sub-dimensions such as "lack of motivation, lack of fear, lack of self-esteem and readiness" when considering the reasons for students' tendency to speak in their mother tongue while they are learning foreign language. When the arithmetic mean values of all dimensions according to gender are examined, it is seen that both male and female students have an opinion on the level of indecision.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

A total number of 11th grade students participated in the research was 80, 44 of whom were male and 36 female. Opinions were made on suggestions that could cause students to tend to use their mother tongue instead of using English during their English language learning; and attempts were made to determine the level of adherence to this point of view. According to the results, it can be said that the students have a fear of making mistakes and of pronouncing English words correctly; that the textbooks do not develop speech; and that the lessons are not focused on the teaching of speaking.

One of the reasons is that it is easier to communicate in their mother tongue than in a foreign language in the learning process. Indeed, as Zhetpisbayeva, Shelestova and Tatyana (2015) point out, when individuals communicate in their mother tongue, they may have a perception that communication in another language is not necessary. According to Ellis (1985), if the foreign-language levels of individuals are not sufficient, they prefer to communicate in the mother tongue in order to not force themselves to learn a foreign language. This is because the language coding in the brain of the individual is the mother tongue, which was first learned and spoken at home. This is a problem in terms of the effective learning of foreign languages. As the foreign-language level improves, the need to communicate in the mother tongue also diminishes.

Despite the fact that students prepare for classes, do homework on time, and even if the course is interesting, they are not sure will they improve their speaking, because of fear of making mistakes and being corrected by the teachers, being mocked by their friends, and they think they are not ready to express themselves in English, and have a negative experience of foreign languages.

It has become clear that the gender of pupils is not a significant variable in terms of the effects of the dimensions such "lack of motivation, lack of self-esteem, and readiness"; and is not a reason why students tend to talk in their mother tongue and avoid using the foreign language. In other words, both male and female students were generally unsure about their reasons for using their mother tongue and avoiding the use of foreign languages. In other words, it can be said that both male and female students think of using the mother tongue in the process of learning a foreign language as partly influenced by the above-mentioned factors.

As a general evaluation, it can be said that English lessons in secondary school do not have enough positive results in terms of reaching the main goal. Students generally avoid using foreign language in the class environment as a result of such problems as

lack of motivation and being criticized by teachers; fear of making mistakes; and not trusting themselves enough.

In general, students avoid using the foreign language they learn; have motivation problems; have a fear of being criticized by teachers; have a fear of being ridiculed by friends; and do not trust themselves enough. The findings of Khati's research that "fear" has an important place in the reasons why students prefer to communicate in the mother tongue while learning a foreign language (Khati, 2011) is supported by the findings of this research. On the other hand, Hachi states that one of the reasons why there is a preference for the mother tongue among learners is an indication of the basic substructure of the brain. In other words, individuals prefer to use their native language, especially in the communication process, where they can express themselves better.

As a result of the research, it can be seen that one of the most important problems that students encountered when learning a foreign language is mockery by a friend, which negatively affects the development of the spoken language. Similar results were found in a study by Ocak, Kuru, & Ozchalishan (2010). In parallel with this study, Penny (2000) states reasons which are more or the less the same as presented here.

In Farah's study (2016) students at higher secondary level (HSC) were asked some questions relating to their process of second-language acquisition and there were some affirmative replies. The study concluded that students believe that their classroom activities are not enough for them to learn English, even if those topics covered in English classes are also not very interesting and the pressure of other subjects assigned for them makes them give more time there than to learning English (L2). As a result, students feel less interest in studying English.

Suleimenova, (2013) states that anxious students fear the following: speaking in a language class; making mistakes; not being understood; being evaluated negatively or poorly; and appearing less competent than other students. From this point of view, one of the most important barriers to students speaking foreign language is students mocking each other, something which negatively affects their self-esteem.

The findings of the research by Hashemi (2011) suggest that language anxiety may originate mostly from learners "own sense of "self"; their self-related cognitions; language-learning difficulties; differences in the learners' and the target-language cultures; differences in the social status of the speakers and interlocutors; and from the fear of losing self-identity. In order to make the classroom a safe and less anxiety-provoking place, the friendly and encouraging role of the teachers was stated as crucial. Hashemi (2011). In the report of Arenas-Iglesias (2016) states, on the other hand, that cultural differences are less important; and students here said they never use L1 in their English class because they feel more connected with their culture.

As a result of the historical view of studies connecting with the use of first language in a foreign-language classroom, foreign-language teaching has been dominated for many decades by the principle that teachers should use only the target language and avoid using the mother tongue (L1) in the classroom. Littlewood and Yu (2009) in their study

provide some suggestions for a framework of principles for balancing first-language and foreign-language use in the classroom.

According to their study, using only the foreign language in the learning environment can lead to some problems - even if the task itself is simple, the instructions or explanations are sometimes so complex.

According to Harbord (1992), the most important point to be made in the discussion on the rights and wrongs of using the mother tongue in the classroom is that translation, and indeed use of the mother tongue generally, is not a device to be used to save time for 'more useful' activities, nor to make life easier for the teacher or the students.

While code-switching is the unavoidable consequence of EFL classes, in her study Yi-chun & Yi-ching (2010) stressed a lot of factors which affect a teacher's decision to use L1 or L2 in teaching. Research studies have revealed that first language is not only an efficient learning tool but also a useful teaching method if pedagogical activities are well designed. Students use L1 to facilitate their process of comprehension and to reduce any insecurities that may arise from their limited language proficiency. Yi-chun & Yi-ching (2010).

Teachers are the most important element in effective language teaching. It is necessary to train teachers with high qualifications in terms of foreign-language teaching. The fact that teachers' knowledge of foreign languages is sufficient does not mean that they can be good foreign-language teachers. According to research conducted by Zhetpisbayeva, Shelestova and Abildina (2016), English teachers in Kazakhstan are not usually at the required level in terms of professional competence. It is also necessary to develop foreign-language teaching materials. Textbooks should be updated and teachers should be trained in using these books effectively.

RECOMMENDATION

According to the findings obtained as a result of the research, the following recommendations may be made:

- Measures should be taken to increase the self-confidence of the students. For this purpose, a more English-speaking environment should be established. It will also be useful to focus on avoiding negative behaviours, such as correcting errors, making fun of etc.
- It is beneficial for English teachers to show more positive attitudes towards students and to be educated in terms of motivational speaking in teaching process.
- It would be helpful to design English textbooks in a more communication-oriented and student-centred manner.

The learning-teaching process of English courses requires to be designed according to a more student-centred model. It may be said that more active students tend to use foreign languages more often.

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