



INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN KAZAKHSTAN: ISSUES OF INSTRUCTION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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The article describes the situation in higher education in Kazakhstan in terms of internationalization. Kazakhstan joined the Bologna Declaration in March 2010 and became the 47th member country of the Bologna process. This status demands the conformity of the educational system to the Bologna requirements. Special emphasis is given to issues of using foreign languages (English) for the professional purposes of faculty and students. Results of a survey about the necessity of the issue were considered, as well as the challenges and difficulties in delivering courses in English.

Keywords: Internationalization, Higher education, Bologna process, Instruction, English.

Internationalizing of the higher education system remains one of the most urgent issues of educational policies of the countries all over the world. After becoming an independent country, Kazakhstan's education system has been reformed intensively. Kazakhstan was the first among post-soviet countries to join the Bologna Declaration in March 2010 and became 47th member country of the Bologna process and a full-rights member of the European education area.

The Kazakhstan educational system has a Soviet background with a linear system of studying. It consisted of 3 stages: higher education - kandidat of sciences - doctor of sciences. That system was found not affordable in modern conditions of educational integration, because it caused difficulties with the recognition of Kazakhstan's diplomas and degrees in developed countries, and reform was required to adopt the system to the world (European) standards. Currently, a credit system has evolved; there are three stages of degrees: bachelor – master - PhD. Necessary measures for developing the academic mobility have been implemented – there are lots of joint educational programs, international collaboration agreements between universities aimed to improve the academic mobility. The international higher educational institute – Nazarbayev University was built according to world standards with the goal of creating graduates fully prepared to contribute to research, education, and the national economy. All academic and research programs at Nazarbayev University are realized in an official partnership with the international scientific organizations and universities; curriculum was developed by world recognized professors and all classes are conducted in English. In fall 2010 the university accepted its first Foundation program students, 2011 – undergraduate students, in fall 2012 they plan to start the graduate program.

The implementation in 1993 of the International Bolashak Scholarship Program initiated by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan has provided the most qualified youth with the opportunity to

study in the best universities of the world. Nowadays (December 2011) there are 8131 Bolashak scholars awarded for Bachelor, Master and PhD degrees' (since 2005) studies and for conducting internship research (since 2008) worldwide. Scholarship is fully funded by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, has high selection requirements, and covers all study related costs. Bolashak alumni have made significant contributions to the country's human resources: among them there are ministers, vice-ministers, top managers of large companies in various sectors of Kazakhstan's economy. In 2005 there was a significant improvement of the mission and meaning of the Bolashak scholarship, there was a goal to offer 3000 scholarships annually, but because a lack of foreign language proficiency by potential applicants, a number of scholarships are being unclaimed each year. An official statistic of the Centre of International Programs, the provider of Bolashak scholarships, shows that the majority of scholars study/research at countries where English is originally used as a language of instruction (Chart 1)¹.

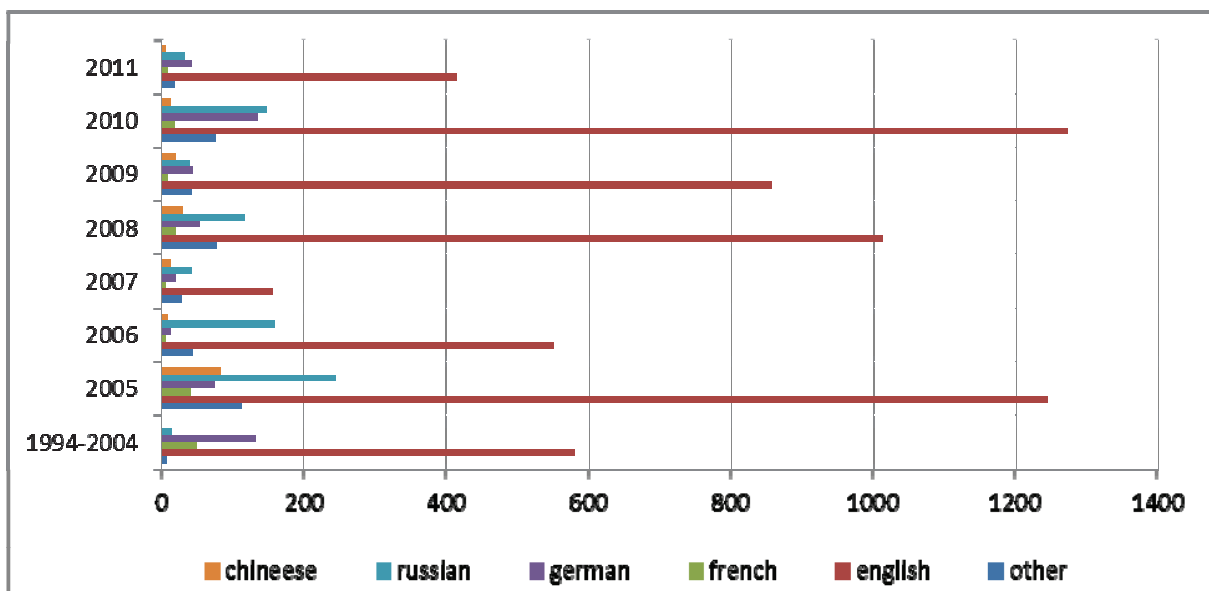


Chart 1. Number of Bolashak scholars studying abroad, ranged by country of study/ language of instruction².

One of the important terms of internationalizing Kazakhstan's higher education is using foreign languages in teaching, learning and research, a process that forces international communication. According to the Constitution of Kazakhstan (1995), Kazakh is the state language; Russian is a language

¹Centre of International Programs' web page: www.edu-cip.kz

²Countries was separated in groups according to the official/major language in each country, but the language of studying is not necessarily the same, because some universities conduct programs in different than official languages, mostly in English

Language	Country
Chinese	China
Russian	Belarus, Russia, Ukraine
French	France
German	Austria, Germany, Switzerland
English	Australia, Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, United States
other	Bulgaria, Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, Israel, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Turkey, Finland, Czech Republic, Sweden, South Korea, Japan

of interethnic communication; both of them are used equally as official. As a consequence of the Soviet regime, the sense of commonality and relational ties were rooted generally in Russian culture and language. Current language policy is directed to gradual strengthening positions and sharing of using native language in the country, as it has already happened in other post-Soviet countries. There is a great discourse about the place of Kazakh and Russian languages in the present and future of the country which has been taking place for long time among the members of the Kazakh multinational community and national and foreign experts (Avakova R., Fierman W., Holm-Hansen J., Qoyshtybayev B., Shaimerdenova N.). The using of the Russian language is slowly declining as a medium for a significant amount of scientific and cultural information. And as in other countries throughout the world, languages of international communication, most importantly English, have become important for many forms or domains of communication.

Today almost half of all Kazakhstan's university students participate in educational programs in Kazakh (during the Soviet period this number did not reach 20%). The proportion studying in Russian is about 49% and tends to decline now. Only 1.6% of the total amount of students study in English (Table 1).

Table 1. Amount of university students studying in different languages in Kazakhstan, 2009-2010³.

Language of instruction	Number of students	%
Kazakh	303 720	49.77
Russian	296 932	48.66
English	9 593	1.57
German	19	0.003

With the current situation in the education system it is a necessity to review educational policy, improving its quality to be able to correspond the world standards. In 2011 **the State program on education development for 2011-2020** was launched in Kazakhstan, among its aims there are “achievement of a high level of higher education quality meeting the demands of labor market, the objectives on industrial-innovative development of the country, satisfying the needs of the person and conforming to the world's best practice in education; formation of an intellectually, physically and spiritually developed citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan in general education institutions, satisfying his/her needs in obtaining education, in order to ensure success in a rapidly changing world”⁴. Some target indicators of the program to 2020, concerning internationalization of education, are given in Chart 2.

³Woodward D. (Ed) Collaboration between Kazakhstan and the United Kingdom in higher education – “British Council INSPIRE” project. Almaty, 2011. P.19

⁴State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011–2020. Available at http://www.edu.gov.kz/en/legislation/state_program_of_education_development_in_the_republic_of_kazakhstan/

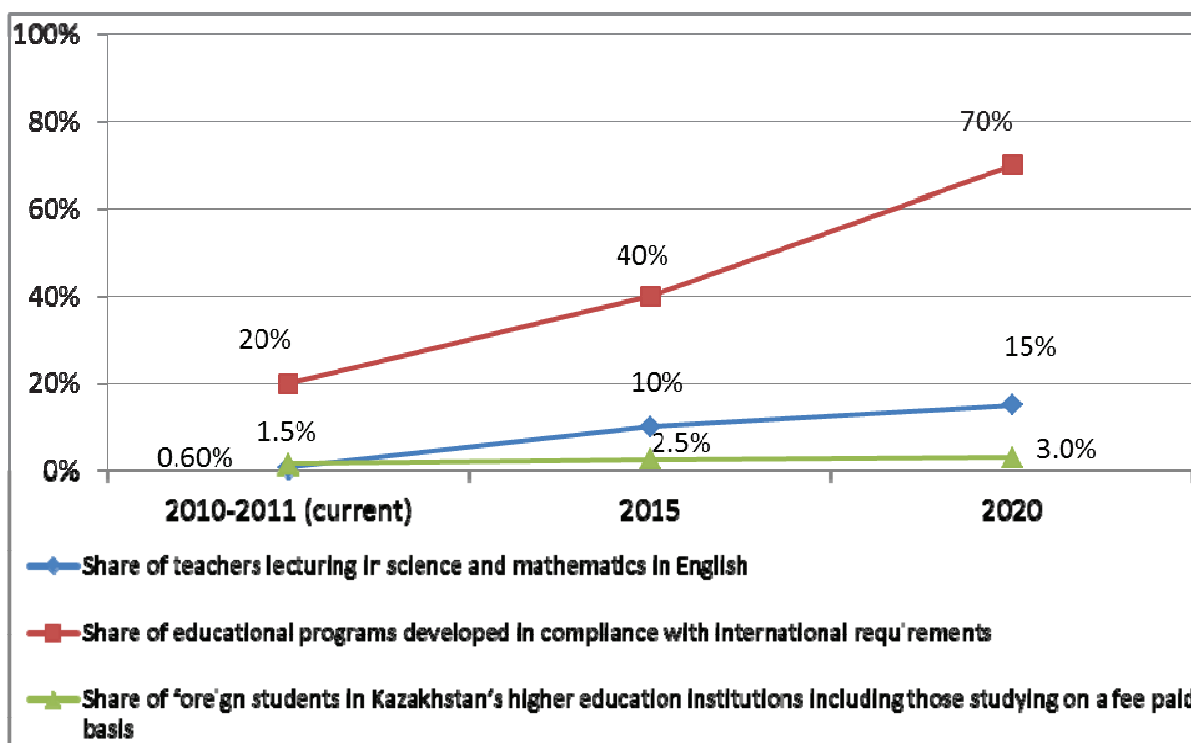


Chart 2. Target indicators of the State program on education development for 2011–2020.

Using English as a medium of instruction will benefit one more significant criterion of internationalization – the rise in the number of foreign students. The current amount of foreign students in Kazakhstan's higher education institutions (1,5%) shows that the country's educational system remains uncompetitive (to compare with Russia – 2%, OESD countries – 6%, USA – 20%⁵ of foreign students, even having large potential for it in its region. Countries such Germany, Japan, Sweden, and many others, where English is not official/dominant language, could considerably attract foreign students and increase their own economic profit by implementing English-medium programs.

Other important projects, which can help to improve the situation, are cultural projects called **the Trinity Languages Project** (2007) and following it **the State program of functioning and development of languages for 2011–2020** by the Ministry of Culture and Information of Kazakhstan. It suggests studying Kazakh, English (as a language which has an importance as an international communication language) and Russian beginning in the preschool; priority will be given to Kazakh and English. According to these both documents, at least 20% of Kazakhstan citizens are due to speak, write and read in English by 2020⁶. The current situation shows that 15.8% of Kazakhstan's population understands oral speech, 10.2% can read and 7.7% write in English⁷.

The issue of the worldwide spread of English is has been discussed in the last few years. According to Gladdol (2006) more people than ever want to learn English and English learners are increasing in number and decreasing in age and English is growing in popularity across the world. The number of non-

⁵State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011–2020. Available at http://www.edu.gov.kz/en/legislation/state_program_of_education_development_in_the_republic_of_kazakhstan/

⁶The State program of functioning and development of languages for 2011–2020. Available at http://www.akorda.kz/ru/official_documents/decrees_of_the_president/e

⁷The Agency of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan – report on National Population Census-2009. Available at www.til.kostanai.kz/uploads/files/1333962491.doc

native speakers of English is substantially larger than its native speakers; the relationship is about four to one. Thus, Gladdol. suggests that the effect of developments in that direction would not be limited to the commercial and educational sectors. Cultural and civil contacts and understanding would also be diluted (Gladdol, 2006:7-8).

House (2003) makes an argument for the necessity and benefit of English as “a language for communication”, describing the research projects currently being carried out at Hamburg University. According to this case, House suggests that English as a lingua franca can be seen as “strengthening the complementary need for native local languages that are rooted in their speakers’ shared history, cultural tradition, practices, conventions, and values as identificatory potential” (House, 562).

Another successful experience of using English for academic purposes at the Graduate School of Engineering, Hokkaido University is presented by Manakul (2007). Thus, the implementation English-medium programs could solve several aims: to attract excellent international students by providing them scholarships, improve the quality of studying, motivate Japanese students to study English, to increase international collaboration with worldwide partners by breaking language barriers, and finally, increasing foreigner’s interest in Japanese language.

However, there is also a growing awareness that mother tongue education is more effective than bilingual or second language medium of instruction (Heugh, 2002) because of lack of second language proficiency by educational process’ participants. Sert in his research (Sert, 2008) describes the case of using English at Turkish university education in three different approaches to language instruction: none of the approaches is considered to be sufficient and efficient to teach English alongside academic content.

Despite the findings of these authors, we maintain the necessity of using English as a medium of instruction to prepare students competitive at current integrated world. We agree with Tsuneyoshi (Tsuneyoshi, 2005), that for a country whose language is used only within its boundaries, using English in higher education has certain internationalizing effects. By West&Frumina, English has a double role in the internationalization of university education: it is a vital tool for both academic staff and students, providing access to academic literature and communication; and it provides the model of international education with established European standards of teaching, proficiency levels, curriculum, assessment and professional competence (West&Frumina, 2012).

A survey carried out in 2010 among Gumilyov Eurasian National University’ 72 majors studying at non-linguistic specialties (Table 2) found that most of them recognized the importance of English, some of them have participated at foreign educational (mostly the European Union’s Erasmus program) and non-educational (as Work & Travel) programs before and were eager to improve their English for academic/professional purposes.

Table 2. Results of survey.

QUESTION		F	%
Are you satisfied by the current amount of hours and quality of teaching of foreign language(s)?	yes	18	25.0
	no	54	75.0
Do you think speaking in foreign languages would increase your professional competitiveness?	yes	66	91.7
	no	6	8.3
Would you like/be ready to prepare your research paper in English?	yes	8	11.1
	no	64	88.9
Would you choose/are you ready to choose theoretical profession-related courses in English if it is proposed as experimental elective/vocational/special course?	yes	65	90.3
	no	7	9.7

Currently there are some problems which make it difficult to implement instructions in English at the universities. The old generation, raised on Soviet traditions, do not speak English and other foreign languages (except of Russian) and even if they are excellent academically, they cannot hold a constructive dialog with international colleagues, and it is also hard to maintain an international level in teaching and research. Some faculty members do not support the idea of using English to teach Kazakh students.

The wide research in the higher education area, conducted in 2010 (by British Council and BISAM Central Asia agency) has shown that only 4% of university faculty have high English proficiency, majority of them are business education representatives. Level of English by science and technical faculty members is much lower (Woodward, 2011). At the same time, two thirds of them use bibliography in English and participate at English-medium conferences. Considering that Almaty is the largest financial and cultural city, where such international universities as KIMEP University, Kazakh-Britain Technical University, International Academy of Business are located, it is certain that the level of the faculty's English proficiency in other regions is considerably lower.

Some of the measures have been already implemented: training of English speaking pedagogical staff under the "Bolashak" International Scholarship was shared by reducing the terms required for university faculty members, and now they have an opportunity to have a scholarship for one-semester-long foreign language course before the beginning of research or graduate program abroad (with starting English proficiency of at least IELTS 3.5).

One of the most important ideas of the State program on education development for 2011-2020 is the issue of training highly-qualified staff for the educational system. Training of pedagogical staff with polylingual education in the country's higher educational institutions will be carried out through the increase in loans for foreign language teaching in the range of basic subjects. For this purpose the standard curriculum will be updated in the part concerning training of pedagogical staff in trilingual teaching.

Obviously, the executed measures are still not enough for successful using English by education area's participants. Even there is agreement about the necessity of English language by students and faculty, the current situation shows that there is lack of readiness and motivation to learn English and use it in professional purposes. As one of the solutions we see the necessity to develop and implement the educational policy which could effectively provide affordable conditions for conducting English-medium programs.

Implementing programs in English will speed up the process of internationalization of Kazakhstan's higher education, and surely improve the academic mobility under the Bologna process. More measures are due to be implemented such as providing individual/group grants for curriculum/course development in foreign languages, creating the support centers for subject-area teachers and foreign language instructors etc. There is a wide choice of other countries' successful experience with this issue which could be taken as a model of policy implementation, to avoid possible negative effects and any unnecessary mistakes.

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