Multilingualism in Kazakhstan’s education system: Implementation and challenges

Assem Dauletkeldyyeva*
L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University
010008, 2 Satpayev Str., Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan

Bayan Smagambet
L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University
010008, 2 Satpayev Str., Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan

Aigul Saliyeva
L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University
010008, 2 Satpayev Str., Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan

Nurlan Baigabylov
L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University
010008, 2 Satpayev Str., Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan

Gaziza Jamaliyeva
Academician E.A. Buketov Karaganda University
100028, 28 Universitetskaya Str., Karaganda, Republic of Kazakhstan

Abstract
Relevance. Kazakhstan’s linguistic landscape reflects its diverse cultural heritage and contemporary geopolitical position. As the country navigates economic development and global integration, the implementation of multilingual education becomes crucial for fostering national unity while preparing citizens for international engagement.

Purpose. This purpose of the study is to analyze the effectiveness and challenges of multilingual education models in Kazakhstan’s educational institutions, from primary schools to universities.

Methodology. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining sociological analysis, statistical data evaluation, and comparative studies of educational practices.

Results. The study reveals that Kazakhstan has adopted various models for implementing trilingual education, including Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). While 117 schools and 42 universities have implemented trilingual programs, significant challenges persist, particularly in teacher training and resource allocation. The language of instruction in higher education shows a predominance of Kazakh (63%) and Russian (34%), with English (3%) gaining traction.

Conclusions. The implementation of multilingual education in Kazakhstan reflects a delicate balance between preserving national identity and fostering global integration. The study highlights the positive impact of multilingualism on individual development and societal progress.

Keywords: educational policy; linguistic diversity; teacher training; cultural identity; trilingual education.

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*Corresponding author

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Introduction

In a globalised world, there are more and more examples of multilingual and multicultural schools offering a broader complex social context for the introduction of multilingualism. One of the tasks of models and practices for the introduction of multilingualism based on comparative sociological analysis performed within the framework of the educational system of multilingualism is to prepare an appropriate environment that respects the individual cultural and linguistic needs of students, and at the same time acts as an optimal space for learning, self-expression and development of communication skills [1].

The introduction of the phenomenon of multilingualism is a key element of the ambitious vision of creating an optimal educational space that provides more opportunities in international labour markets. Given the growing mobility in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the arrival of a large number of young people from third countries to study, it is very important to make multilingualism a central place in educational and sociological projects.

The intensification of linguistic diversity in compulsory education works with an emphasis on achieving the concept of language awareness, which provides an inclusive framework for language teaching taking into account the language skills of students. With this definition, multilingualism is widespread in modern societies because many people develop multilingualism as a result of international mobility, migration, or education. On the one hand, it is a potential, and on the other— a challenge and responsibility, including for teachers working with multilingual children and youth [2].

The introduction of multilingualism is an important issue in education, and multilingual classes or units in which teaching takes place in two or more languages are increasingly common. This is conditioned by the need to have a good command of at least one foreign language, which is very important in the conditions of developing globalisation. In addition, from the standpoint of sociology, the sources of the current universality of multilingualism are extensive due to the existence of numerous ethnic and linguistic minorities in many regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the increase in emigration, which leads to the emergence of multi-ethnic societies, and to the growing mobility of society and access to technology and mass media [3]. In addition to the functional benefits of learning a language, multilingualism is associated with understanding cultures.

By creating their own unique language system, a multilingual person also understands their relationship with both cultures to which the language code has given access. Such a person constantly connects and mixes aspects of the cultures, making linguistic or cultural choices according to the needs of circumstances. Undoubtedly, the introduction of this phenomenon broadens the horizons and adds useful skills. Moreover, it has huge cognitive advantages that, despite being subject to too many variables that cannot be distinguished, are real and meaningful.

Multilingualism is a difficult field to study, which combines aspects of the level of education, the tasks used, differences in languages and language combinations. Multilingualism is becoming more and more common in the modern world, it opens up new perspectives, facilitates the study of new languages, forms creative and analytical thinking [4]. In connection with migration processes, it is necessary to significantly support the languages of origin of students when teaching foreign languages in institutions, which offer the student to integrate the skills acquired during the study of the first foreign language by studying other foreign languages, which in practice, however, causes problems. For this reason, many teachers refuse to compare the use of other languages at certain stages of teaching, thereby inspiring their students to think [5].

To prepare students to perform multilingual tasks during study and work, educational institutions offer bilingual lesson modules, thereby introducing specific subjects, such as mathematics or history, not only in Kazakh, but also in a foreign language. In addition, various exchange programmes, competitions and international certificates provided to students and university teachers, which are designed to encourage the study of other languages and new cultures, are actively used in the educational system [6; 7].

The purpose of the study is to consider the models and practices of the introduction of multilingualism in the context of education in the Republic of Kazakhstan through comparative sociological analysis.

Materials and Methods

The methodological basis of the study was based on the following methods: sociological, statistical, and comparative. The sociological approach attempts a sociological view of certain aspects of the introduction of multilingualism, the main purpose of which is a theoretical understanding of selected social conditions under which models and practices of the introduction of multilingualism in the modern world are used. The consequences of the growth of linguistic diversity acquire symbolic significance and are used to form individual and group identity.

The need for a sociological study of the social determinants of multilingualism allows for a deeper understanding of the impact of conditions on sociological theories and educational programmes. A characteristic feature of the current method is the search, formulation and generalisation of patterns of phenomena occurring between people, the study of structures and rights of mutual consolidation, which manifest themselves in all spheres of public life, formed spontaneously next to all the actions of individuals and institutions. The main subject of interest is human communities consisting of mutual interactions seeking to satisfy their needs, regardless of whether these interactions are conscious or are the result of a system of introduction of multilingualism, cultural models, and traditions.

The statistical approach considers data on the introduction of multilingualism in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan to optimise reactions and processes, which allows simultaneously evaluating a large number of parameters in a small number of experiments. The raw data that can be used to make decisions about the multilingualism process is available at any stage. The information obtained in this way should be included in a
detailed implementation plan, which can then be used in the implementation process.

The use of the statistical method, which is the most effective way to streamline and optimise data structures, makes it possible to structure management, during which the identification, description, monitoring and improvement of the effectiveness of models and practices for the introduction of multilingualism takes place. The implementation of this occurs through a chain of changes, which requires an impact at the input and gives a certain result at the output, the effect of the initially accepted goal. The spheres of practical educational application confirm that statistical data can be an ideal solution, the application of which will effectively implement modern methods and ways of implementing optimal linguistic diversity in the educational system of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The comparative approach implies an analysis of countries and regions on the issue of multilingualism. It is engaged in the search and description of general principles both within a specific language and in all languages. The results of these searches imply the use of linguistic models in language teaching, which are purely descriptive in nature, avoiding any value judgments or trying to outline the course of the development of multilingualism. However, many models and methods define language norms, imposing certain norms that can take responsibility for ensuring that future generations use a variety of languages.

The products of linguistic knowledge are used mainly in those spheres of human activity in which the subjects of social relations belong to different linguistic communities. The concepts of multilingualism cover a wide range of normative practices and phenomena arising in the context of human language, primarily related to its institutional regulation and standardisation. This phenomenon is caused by the emergence of national states and the formation of standard languages perceived as elements of national unity. In this aspect, various practices and techniques of educational institutions of the Republic of Kazakhstan were considered, and appropriate models for the introduction of multilingualism in other countries.

Results and Discussion
The Republic of Kazakhstan is a multinational and multi-confessional state, where more than 126 representatives of different nationalities live. At the present stage of development of the Kazakh society, bilingualism is gradually turning into multilingualism. One of the most important strategic goals of Kazakhstan's language policy is the need to speak several languages: Kazakh, Russian, and English. Currently, the state is implementing a general modernisation of the education system and introducing a policy of multilingualism in the educational process. Experimental platforms for multilingual education have been created in several Kazakh universities and secondary schools. The young generation of Kazakhstan is involved in the process of multilingual education. It is expected that 100% of the population will speak Kazakh, 95% – Russian, and 25% – English. To achieve these goals, a fundamentally new type of education is being developed that encourages students to read, write, listen and speak sufficiently to communicate effectively in three different languages. Reading plays an important role in all parts of the programme [8].

Students of multilingual education have many opportunities to present their knowledge. This has become possible thanks to self-organising conferences, speeches, presentations, meetings, and shows that are held throughout the academic year. This approach allows students to prepare for work in the adult world. It also develops their critical thinking, leadership skills, and interpersonal communication skills. Many educational documents state that multilingualism is the mainstay of a single country, ensuring its stable functioning. Thus, the development and strengthening of language competencies in both native and foreign languages is one of the main lines of language policy.

The Kazakh trilingual educational programme supports the idea of multilingualism. This is mainly manifested in the current basic curriculum of general education. It produces the obligation to study one foreign language from the beginning of primary school and the mandatory study of two foreign languages in junior and senior high school. The organisation of language training is designed in such a way that the student has the opportunity to learn up to three foreign languages in the period from primary to secondary school. The trend towards the growth of multilingualism, first of all, is noticeable at the level of primary and lower secondary schools, where after the introduction of the current basic curriculum, the compulsory study of one or two foreign languages began.

Kazakh schools pay great attention to language education, which, as it has been shown, is one of the main priorities of modern educational policy. Russian is “the language of international communication”. The state programme, introduced in 2012, has so far led to the fact that children are learning three languages already in kindergarten [9]. Previously, English was taught from the first grade of elementary school. It seems that the next step should be to check to what extent the assumptions proposed in the basic multilingual curriculum of language education have been successfully implemented [10; 11].

The value of multilingualism is constantly emphasised in the language policy, but the languages of the border regions are given special attention. Border areas are areas inhabited by at least two different groups, where a multilingual community has formed as a result of long-term interaction. It is necessary to emphasise the form of the internal borderland, when both groups live in the same state organism, where they can unite and mix with the external form. The most important reasons for the formation of multilingual communities are various historical settlements and border changes. This creates a community with different languages, backgrounds, and religions. For this reason, there is a certain special interpersonal sensitivity in these regions, since groups that differ in religion, views and lifestyle coexist here. In the border areas, some characteristic trends are also clearly visible, manifested in other areas, although to a lesser extent. First of all, there are very strong tendencies to promote own language, especially where it has gone through a period of forced suppression from above.

It is quite obvious that there is another trend, namely the phenomenon known as the educational pyramid. This indicates the strong will of minority groups to provide their
children with education in their native language in primary schools, as well as a significant decrease in interest in such education in lower secondary schools and even the disappearance of this type of trend in the secondary schools. This means extremely strong pressure from parents to combine language with the formation of the identity of young children, but also their growing interest in mastering the majority language, that is, the official language at higher levels of education, for example, professional and financial.

The Republic of Kazakhstan demonstrates a characteristic mobility problem: multilingual areas increase the linguistic and educational difficulties of immigrants, because they have to deal not only with a new language, but also with bilingualism and trilingualism of residents of their new place of residence, including difficulties associated with the need to understand local dialects. These reinforced language barriers make it difficult to implement the school curriculum and are problems that many educational institutions, not only border ones, face today [12].

In the case of both people belonging to historical minority groups and immigrants or re-emigrants, there is a natural sense of difference from representatives of the majority language, which is the official language of the country of residence. The uniqueness is also often emphasised by those representatives of the majority who consider themselves the only full-fledged citizens of their country, and sometimes some of them, for various reasons, deny such a right to people who speak other languages. This can affect even those who return to their country after many years, and often affects those who were born and raised in it, although their home language is different from the official one. Then there is the phenomenon of attributed, imposed or expected identity, that is, some kind of external identification that should not suit this person. However, such a person is criticised, and sometimes even persecuted, only because their personality does not match the one indicated by the criticism. This is a particularly difficult issue that affects the multilingualism of young people, so teachers and institutions should not ignore this problem.

The most complete model of multilingual development is dynamic. This psycholinguistic model of individual multilingualism is based on a holistic approach to the linguistic competencies of a multilingual user whose linguistic knowledge is not the sum of monolingual competencies in each acquired person. It points to individual differences between language learners and takes into account the presence of dynamic relationships between social and psycholinguistic variables that determine the process of language acquisition [13].

According to the current model, multilingualism is variability over time, the absence of linear and constant growth, that is, the possibility of loss of language knowledge. In order to maintain the stability of the acquired linguistic competence, it is necessary to make efforts to maintain it, which depends on the time and energy of students. The ability to spend on the acquisition and maintenance of individual language competencies, which, in turn, depend on the communicative needs of a particular language user, explains why bilingual people do not achieve the same level of proficiency in both languages as monolinguals.

The fundamental difference between language acquisition in a natural context and in the context of directed learning is conditioned by the fact that language acquisition in a natural context occurs as a result of authentic use of language in relaxed conditions, when language is a means of transmitting real information, thoughts, and feelings, which contributes to the rapid development of language skills. Implicit learning is more effective than guided and supervised learning, which is a conscious, intentional and explicit process that leads to faster, spontaneous and frivolous use of a given language form. Immersion in the natural language environment for quite a long time is, of course, the most optimal form of acquiring multilingualism, since it requires frequent repetition [14].

One of the best practices for implementing multilingualism is CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), an educational approach to language learning promoted by the European Commission as a way to develop multilingualism. CLIL is a general term covering various forms of bilingual education. This can mean both teaching this subject in a foreign language, and introducing elements of other subjects from the school curriculum into teaching a foreign language. In other words, CLIL is two in one, that is, a related language and the study of the subject. This approach is actively developing in various forms, mainly thanks to teachers. It can be implemented at different stages of training, from primary to secondary and university.

The easiest strategy to implement is a mixed model, in which one language is used alternately in the educational environment, and then another. This method is most effective in two or multilingual communities where all languages function side by side on an equal basis. For example, in Canada, where two official languages naturally function simultaneously – English and French. However, a mixed strategy may turn out to be a bit chaotic, so it is necessary to carefully consider the possibility of its implementation among students living in communities with one dominant language.

Contrary to popular belief, most of the population of the Republic of Kazakhstan is bilingual or multilingual. Multilingualism refers to the presence of several languages in a given space, regardless of who speaks them. In some communities, the ability to manipulate two or more languages can lead to very complex language transformation schemes. Some groups very regularly use the so-called “diglossia”, in which one option is used in informal situations, for example, at home, and the other in more formal situations, which is usually associated with prestige.

Intensive migration flows are changing the approach to language learning in Kazakhstan. Teachers are faced with the problem of a new definition of didactics and methodology of teaching Kazakh, Russian, and English languages, which require appropriate materials and a structured methodological approach [15]. The changes should concern not only the teaching process and the organisation of schools, but also the appropriate training of teachers who will be qualified to work in a multilingual educational institution. Researchers consider
multilingualism as a value and a huge potential that should be used in language lessons and not only.

The results of the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) study contributed to the popularisation of the KIKUS (Kinder in Kulturen und Sprachen) method. It involves systematic linguistic support for students with migration experience by actively including the first language in their studies. To implement the method, a KIKUS digital software suite was created. The most important assumption of the method is teaching the language and its subsystems – vocabulary and grammar with the help of colloquial speech. The KIKUS method refers to the mechanisms that take place in the process of learning the first language and involves not only the introduction of vocabulary, but also samples of language activity.

The element that distinguishes the KIKUS model is the support of multilingualism and linguistic diversity. The method involves the simultaneous development of the student's first and second language skills, according to which a good knowledge of the first language has a positive effect on the development of skills and competencies in the second language. In addition to the language competence itself, an attitude of openness to foreign cultures and languages is being formed. Multilingualism is perceived by modern researchers as part of a holistic development model for all languages, native, and additional, acquired in different contexts, within one individual system. This concept of multilingualism is characterised by the fact that every other language does not start from scratch, but is used by existing language knowledge.

Comparative sociological analysis has shown that the majority of students of various educational institutions of the Republic of Kazakhstan began to learn English and Kazakh in the 1st grade of primary school. The coverage of multilingualism is increasing due to social, economic, professional, and educational mobility. It includes not only the languages of national minorities, but also the languages of immigrants and ethnic groups temporarily residing in a particular territory.

Considering the languages of national and ethnic minorities together, it can be concluded that every seventh European resident does not speak the official language of the country of residence as a native language, and this has huge consequences for education systems. This study identified more than 450 languages spoken by children in 22 European Union countries. The social and educational difficulties associated with multilingualism are clearly visible in urban areas. In large cities, namely Hamburg, Gothenburg, Madrid, Lyon, Hague, and Brussels, it was found that the number of languages spoken by residents of these cities today ranges from 50 to 90, which completely changes the language landscape of this territory [16].

In the USA, multilingual education continues mainly for national minorities and involves rapid mastery of the English language and full adaptation to the school system. The main function of the programme is the assimilation of national minorities through intensive language training.

In the Austrian concept of multilingualism, in addition to a foreign language, at least three subjects are taught. Bilingual education is preceded by an intensive foreign language course lasting 10 hours a week in grades 7-8 of primary school. This creates a linguistic basis for the introduction of multilingual education in secondary schools. The idea of bilingual education is to give lectures on subjects in a foreign language with terminological bilingualism. Dogmatic application of this principle in the early stages may lead to the lecture being misunderstood or incomprehensible. The growth of gaps in cognitive structures in such situations makes it difficult to integrate new information with knowledge structures created in the native language, and thus in the process of acquiring knowledge in a foreign language. This causes an excessive overload of students, a high level of stress and, as a result, a motivational breakdown.

Thus, the strict application of the principle of abandoning the native language in bilingual education is harmful and has no grounds for this. At the initial stage, the best results are achieved if students can process information in two languages. Therefore, a gradual increase in the use of a foreign language is more substantiated. First of all, this concerns a teacher who tries, already during the adaptation period, to conduct a lecture in a foreign language, and students can answer in their native or foreign languages. If they do it in their native language, the teacher can repeat the student's statement in a foreign language or help formulate it.

The practice of trilingualism has been introduced in the Republic of Kazakhstan, which was invented ten years ago, however, there is still a shortage of sufficiently qualified personnel for its implementation. In the 2015-2016 academic years, 63% of state university students were employed in Kazakh, 34% – in Russian, and 3% – in English. A few years ago, this proportion was different – in favour of the Russian [17]. The Republic of Kazakhstan intends to adopt a new alphabet, replacing the Russian Cyrillic alphabet with Latin. This was stated in October by the ex-leader of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, who signed Decree No. 569, which also specifies an expanded version of the Latin alphabet, which was partially introduced in schools in 2018, the goal of which is a complete transition by 2025. The Cyrillic alphabet currently used in the Kazakh language consists of 42 characters (33 characters of the Russian alphabet and 9 additional Kazakh sounds) [18]. Since there are only 26 letters in the Latin alphabet, an additional solution was needed. The new Kazakh alphabet will use an apostrophe to increase the number of letters to 32. The English-speaking world is not used to state interference in the language, interfering with its structure and the way it is used. Proposals for an official language have come and gone over the centuries, but English, unusually in an international context, is relatively unplanned [18].

Language planning, sometimes called language management or improvement, and the related development of language policy is not only a matter of the state level, because it also characterises how relationships develop at other levels: in education, religious groups, business, families. Wherever language practices are controlled or changed by the authorities, there is language planning. It is unlikely that the direction of influence on language planning will change soon. Language policy will continue as the central vector of changes in the reconfiguration of socio-political constitutions. The educational revolution
Sociological theories of education not only keeps pace with the changing world, but also participates in changes, providing tools for the interpretation and formation of social processes and the introduction of multilingualism, where old and new concepts are contrasted and combined [19]. According to the hypothesis of interdependence, there are whole areas of general extralinguistic knowledge that develop due to the mutual interaction of languages and form the basis of language development. An example is the ability of schoolchildren to consistently tell stories, which later leads to success in writing and reading.

Experimental studies in which bilingual students outperformed monolingual students obviously vary greatly, but have an important common denominator. All of them require excellent cognitive control, that is, the involvement of certain control functions of the brain. To do them, it is necessary to slow down the execution of one type of task and start the execution of another, prohibit looking from your own opinion and accept the opinion of another person, suppress insignificant noise, and focus on understanding the message.

Thus, being in a multilingual context and juggling languages supports cognitive control mechanisms, which simplifies the alternation of tasks. According to the theory of language action and functional pragmatics, speaking is one of the most important forms of linguistic activity, and the process of language learning progresses through the acquisition of appropriate language models [20; 21].

Since 2018, the history of Kazakhstan has been taught in Kazakh, and the general history – in Russian. In 2019-2020, the teaching of computer science, chemistry, physics, and biology in grades 9 and 10 in English was introduced. That is, trilingualism is a strategic decision of the authorities. The Head of State decided to use English because modern science uses it, a large number of students speak Russian, and Kazakh is the state language. According to the President, every citizen should speak these languages. This is done to support the preservation of identity, development and integration into the world economy. The Ministry of Education has developed a special programme for the implementation of the presidential project. Instruction in three languages is conducted in 117 schools, in which 63 thousand students study, or 2.3%. Classes are conducted in English in 42 universities [22; 23].

The biggest problem is the lack of teachers with appropriate language skills. Multilingual education is an element of multiculturalism policy, since the Republic of Kazakhstan is a multinational state that strives to integrate society and productively resolve internal conflicts. According to official statistics, 66% of the country’s population are Kazakhs, and the largest minority is Russians – 21%, who make up the majority in the northern regions. Maintaining the high status of the Russian language is not only a matter of relations with Russia, but also a tool for maintaining peace within the state.

Conclusions
Thus, the models and practices of the introduction of multilingualism are valuable not only from the standpoint of personal development but also from society. This should be remembered not only at the stage of designing didactic classes, but also with regard to teacher training and the creation of educational policy, which will help to comprehend the phenomenon of multilingualism, its multidimensionality and share experience of its use in practice. Dynamic socio-economic, technological, and cultural transformations mean that the old educational schemes have ceased to exist, and the new ones are constantly checking the present. These changes are especially noticeable at school, especially in language classes, where students, who often represent very different cultures, meet, communicate in several languages, and pursue different life goals. In addition, the role of a teacher is necessarily different – to learn how to communicate effectively in a multilingual context.

Globalisation and its impact on multilingualism are more than noticeable. Multilingual education, unlike conventional classes with a foreign language, helps students achieve a higher level of language competence and, consequently, increase the chances of continuing their studies in various educational institutions. Multilingual education is becoming increasingly popular in the Republic of Kazakhstan. This form of education is invariably associated with the teaching of non-linguistic subjects through the use of a foreign language; however, this is only a superficial description of what multilingualism can bring.

In the era of globalisation, the integration of content and language is a fertile ground for sowing intercultural education, which will allow many cultures to develop in one educational space. The advantages of multilingual education are significant – the student's self-esteem increases, the motivation to study and be active increases, the vocabulary grows. Moreover, linguistic diversity has a positive effect on the development of language knowledge, therefore, on the development of the first language and the study of another foreign language.

The processes of globalisation significantly affect the aspects of the introduction of this phenomenon. Its various situations contribute to the development of multilingualism, which now boils down to trilingualism – the use of Kazakh, Russian, and English. The introduction of official languages in the current area depends entirely on the prestige that the state enjoys in comparison with other languages functioning in the community. The concept of linguistic prestige refers to social classes. Most often, the language of the upper classes in the state enjoys a higher authority than the languages used by the lower classes.

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Conflict of Interest
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Багатомовность в системе освіти Казахстану: Імплементація та виклики

Асем Даулеткельдиева
Євразійський національний університет імені Гумільова
010008, вулиця Сатпаєва, 2, м. Астана, Республіка Казахстан

Баян Смагамбет
Євразійський національний університет імені Гумільова
010008, вулиця Сатпаєва, 2, м. Астана, Республіка Казахстан

Айгуль Салієва
Євразійський національний університет імені Гумільова
010008, вулиця Сатпаєва, 2, м. Астана, Республіка Казахстан

Нурлан Байгабилов
Євразійський національний університет імені Гумільова
010008, вулиця Сатпаєва, 2, м. Астана, Республіка Казахстан

Газіза Джамалієва
Карагандинський державний університет імені академіка Є. А. Букетова
100028, вулиця Університетська, 28, м. Караганда, Республіка Казахстан

Анотація

Актуальність. Мовний ландшафт Казахстану відображає його різноманітну культурну спадщину та сучасне геополітичне становище. Оскільки країна рухається шляхом економічного розвитку та глобальної інтеграції, впровадження багатомовної освіти набуває вирішального значення для зміцнення національної єдності та підготовки громадян до міжнародної взаємодії.

Мета. Метою дослідження є аналіз ефективності та викликів моделей багатомовної освіти в освітніх установах Казахстану, від початкової школи до університету.

Методологія. У дослідженні використано змішаний підхід, що поєднує соціологічний аналіз, статистичну обробку даних та порівняльні дослідження освітніх практик.

Результати. Дослідження показує, що Казахстан прийняв різні моделі для впровадження тримовної освіти, включаючи предметно-мовне інтегроване навчання (CLIL). Хоча 117 шкіл і 42 університети впровадили тримовні програми, залишаються значні проблеми, особливо в підготовці вчителів і розподілі ресурсів. У вищій освіті переважають казахська (63%) і російська (34%) мови викладання, а англійська (3%) набуває все більшого поширення.

Висновки. Впровадження багатомовної освіти в Казахстані відображає делікатний баланс між збереженням національної ідентичності та сприянням глобальній інтеграції. Дослідження підкреслює позитивний вплив багатомовності на індивідуальний розвиток і суспільний прогрес.

Ключові слова: освітня політика; мовне розмаїття; підготовка вчителів; культурна ідентичність; тримовна освіта.