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ПРОБЛЕМЫ ВНЕДРЕНИЯ РАННЕГО ОБУЧЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ В РАМКАХ РЕАЛИЗАЦИИ ПОЛИЯЗЫЧНОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ

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В данной статье рассматриваются проблемы организации раннего обучения английскому языку в начальной школе в условиях казахстанского полиязычия и обзор мнений учителей по внедрению английского языка в 1–4 классах. Внедрение раннего обучения английскому языку в этом контексте предстает как инновационный процесс, требующий создания оценки, освоения и применения педагогических новшеств. Обучение английскому языку в начальной школе в условиях языковой ситуации Казахстана требует системных решений, связанных с его нормативным, научно-методическим, кадровым и ресурсным обеспечением. Авторами проведен анализ зарубежного опыта, который соотнесен с состоянием раннего обучения английскому языку, типичного для современного Казахстана в условиях совместного изучения родного, государственного и английского языков. На основе сравнения обозначены проблемные моменты этого процесса.

Данные для исследования были получены посредством анкетирования 105 учителей английского языка разных школ на предмет обеспеченности школ квалифицированными педагогическими кадрами, учебной литературой, дидактическими материалами, учебно-материальной базой к организации образовательного процесса, а также готовности учителей преподавать английский язык с первого класса учащимся 6–7 лет.

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Проведенный анализ показал, что наряду с положительным опытом преподавания английского языка с первого класса в отдельных школах и гимназиях, существует проблема системной организации преподавания иностранного языка в начальной школе.

Ключевые слова: раннее обучение, обучение английскому языку, начальная школа, профессиональное развитие, дидактическое обеспечение.

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PROBLEMS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IMPLEMENTATION INTO PRIMARY SCHOOLS FOR MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract

The current research aims to investigate English teachers' ideas towards the implementation of the curriculum for teaching English as a third language to grades 1-4 and the organization of English Language Teaching (ELT) in primary schools in the conditions of multilingualism in Kazakhstan. Implementation of ELT into Primary Schools is innovative process demanding an assessment, development and practice of pedagogical innovations. In the condition of a language situation in Kazakhstan, ELT in primary schools demands the system decisions connected with its standard, scientific and methodical research, staff teaching and resource providing. The authors made the analysis of international experience, which is correlated with the state of early English language education, typical of modern Kazakhstan. On the basis of the comparison problematic aspects of this process are indicated and presented in the form of the organizational and pedagogical conditions of English language teaching at early stage in Kazakhstan.



The data for the study is gathered from 105 primary school English teachers from different school via a questionnaire. The questionnaire has closed and open-ended questions and aims at finding teachers views about the starting age/grade for language learning, the type of teachers' professional development for English teaching in primary schools, modern teaching materials (programs, curriculum and instructional kits (CIK), methodological literature, etc.), activities which are used in primary schools by language teachers.

Analysis of the problem enables to reveal that along with the positive experience some school have had in teaching English language to young learners (ELYL) from the 1st grade, most schools have not yet made a transition to the system organization of teaching foreign languages in the primary school.

Keywords

Young learners, English language teaching, primary school, professional development, teaching materials.

Introduction

The importance of the English language in Kazakhstani society is increasingly being discussed in the press and at research forums, and proficiency in English has been widely regarded as a national as well as a personal asset [13, p.54]. In the Annual Address of the President, Nursultan Nazarbayev – to the people of Kazakhstan "Kazakhstan Way – 2050: Common Goal, Common Interest and Common Future"¹ the President mentioned that " We have a great deal of work to do to improve the quality of all parts of national education. For a modern citizen of Kazakhstan, proficiency in three languages is a requirement for self well-being. High school graduates should speak Kazakh, Russian and English. Therefore, I believe by 2020 the proportion of the English speaking population should be at least 20 percent".

On a national level, English language has been viewed by Kazakhstani leadership as having a vital role to play in national modernization and development [1, p.3]. On an individual level, proficiency in English can lead to a host of economic, social and educational opportunities; that is, it can provide access to both material

resources and 'symbolic capital' [4] for the betterment of personal well-being. For example, it is a passport to higher education at home or abroad, lucrative employment in the public or private sector, professional advancement and social prestige [10, p. 290]. Due to the prominence accorded to English and the escalating demands for English proficiency, huge national and individual efforts and resources have been invested in English language education and development [19, p. 9].

The last decade saw a renewed attempt to expand English into the primary curriculum. In accordance with the strategic plan of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MES of RK) for the years 2011-2015, in 2013 State Educational Standards (SES) were developed for primary education and curriculum for teaching English to Grades 1-4. The new curriculum offers considerable changes in language education. The starting age for English language learning (ELL) is lowered to 6-7 years of age (Grade 1). English has been included as a compulsory subject in the state curriculum in the field of "Language and Literature" from the first grade. This emphasizes

¹ Послание Президента Республики Казахстан Н. Назарбаева народу Казахстана. "Казакстанский путь – 2050: Единая цель, единые

интересы, единое будущее", 17 января 2014 г. www.strategy2050.kz

the importance of all three languages (Kazakh, Russian and English) in the development and education of students as well as the importance of language development as the foundation of all education [22, p.15].

However, no matter how carefully the new curriculum was planned, effective language learning depends on teachers' knowledge, skills and professional development. Changes in a TEYL curriculum should satisfy the teachers' need for the profound qualifications regarding interactional and communicative competences [14, p.98]. Regarding the effectiveness of TEYL, the quality of the teaching force, as well as training provided to the teachers, become key considerations. Although theoretical points are important in the decision making process when lowering the age of ELL, current resources, the teachers' professional development and readiness in TEYL as well as their theoretical and current practical knowledge should also be considered. In sum, as Tinsley and Comfort (2012) states, an early start to FLE can only be beneficial through some key concerns: sufficient time allocation, qualified and 'sufficient number of well-trained teachers', 'age-appropriate pedagogy', and 'a suitable curriculum context'. Therefore, before any changes are put into practice, present infrastructure needs to be determined to improve the decisions made at the governmental level. From this aspect the present study is an attempt to analyze the current situation from the teachers' point of view. The contexts in which educational policies are tempted to make changes towards the point where lowering the LL age is a consideration, contribution, and readiness need to be taken into consideration. For this purpose in mind, the current study aims to investigate teachers' views about the starting age for English learning, language teachers' professional development and their readiness to teach EL from Grade 1, primary school current resources,

activities that are used in primary schools by language teachers, as well as the problems that still exist, in the development of teaching English to young learners.

Method

To address these issues in the study different sources and scientific methods were used: the study of literature, interviews and questionnaires for the teachers who teach English in the primary schools, quantitative and content analyses.

The introduction of the SES project in Kazakhstan raises many questions in terms of teachers' awareness on the underlying principles and theories of early LL, their points of view about the appropriate age to start L2 and L3 education, their ideas about current resources for TEYL, and their current classroom activities. A survey type research design is used in the current study to find answers to the following questions:

- Which age is going to be successful for ELL?
- Which type of professional development concerning TEYL teachers have passed?
- Are teachers provided with modern teaching materials (programs, curriculum and instructional kits (CIK), methodological literature, etc.)?
- What activities are used in primary schools by language teachers?
- What are the reasons for young learners' low level of results in the study of the foreign language?

105 English teachers working in primary schools in Kazakhstan took part in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was conducted in general education schools, where the pilot project on early learning of English (starting from Grade 2) had not been previously conducted, as well as in gymnasium schools, where there had



been some experience in early learning of English [22, p.15].

To conduct the questionnaire, we prepared the questions (closed-ended and open-ended) that aimed to find teachers' views about the most appropriate time to start learning of English; language teachers' professional development and the quality and availability of resources required for the organization of the educational process (teaching and learning materials for teachers and students). Its goal was also to determine whether these resources are used efficiently. The second unit with 14 closed-ended and open-ended questions aimed to investigate teachers' major pedagogies which are used in classes and reasons for young learners' low level of results in the study of the foreign language. In this study, we sought to identify what difficulties arise for primary school language teachers as well as to find out what teachers require in order to improve the educational process in the primary school to conduct efficient English lessons [22, p.15].

Enthusiasm for "the younger the better" has always been high; however it has sometimes met critical evaluations [17, p.234]. In response to the evaluations, 'intellectual readiness of young learners' and 'the critical period hypothesis' (CPH) have always been the most cited issues used to support the claims of early language learning in academic debates. Although there are large amounts of empirical findings, the benefits of early language learning are still questionable: some academicians support the CPH [7, p.89], whereas others claim that there is not such a critical period [2, p.109]. It is clearly seen that there is not any firm conclusions about young learners' early start to foreign language (FL). On the other hand, there is an agreement that young learners learn languages in a different way than older learners and have some advantages over the older ones who start later. What is much clearer is that the reasons for an early start need to be

understood well before introduction and implementation of early language learning (ELL) programs.

Results

The first unit of the questionnaire showed the results about the most appropriate time to start learning of English. The results revealed that most of the teachers (89%) supported the idea "the younger the better" and that the most appropriate time to teach EL should start from Grade 1 of primary school and earlier, and only 4.5% of the participants thought that teaching EL at this stage is not effective. The majority (90.1%) agreed that children are ready to learn EL from Grade 1 of primary school, explaining their reasons in the open-ended questions. Most of the participants (89.1 %) thought that the English teaching hours in primary school should be increased and 86.2 % of them stated that providing a one-year intensive pre-schooling preparation is important for learners' ELL.

The survey reveals that the resources needed to ensure the favourable conditions necessary for a successful early start in English language learning are inadequate in many contexts. Of fundamental importance is the pre-service training and continuing professional development of the teachers of English, in both English language and teaching methodology, so they develop the confidence and ability to create the natural, language-rich environment conducive to the early years and primary English language classrooms and meet the evolving needs of their 21st century learners.

The suggestions for solving the teacher shortage problem may reflect a lack of understanding of the challenges in teaching English to young learners. Teachers can be considered qualified if they are not only competent in the target language, but also know how to teach young learners. Teachers' language

proficiency is important in that it is largely determinant of what students can achieve in a foreign language learning context, given that teachers are the major source of students' language input [12, p.359]. And since young learners have age-specific characteristics with regard to cognitive development, learning style, and attention span [3, p.45], teachers should also know how to tailor their instruction to the needs of young learners. In the absence of qualified teachers, low quality instruction may de-motivate young learners [5, p. 106] and even interfere with their future learning.

Effective teachers' development demands both more and different forms of professional development. Too often, courses are isolated events that are not connected to changes in schools. More effective forms of development tend to be welcomed by teachers themselves, who are often willing to contribute to the cost of such education in money and time. Effective individual professional development sits alongside collective learning, with teachers exchanging ideas and collaborating to improve classroom

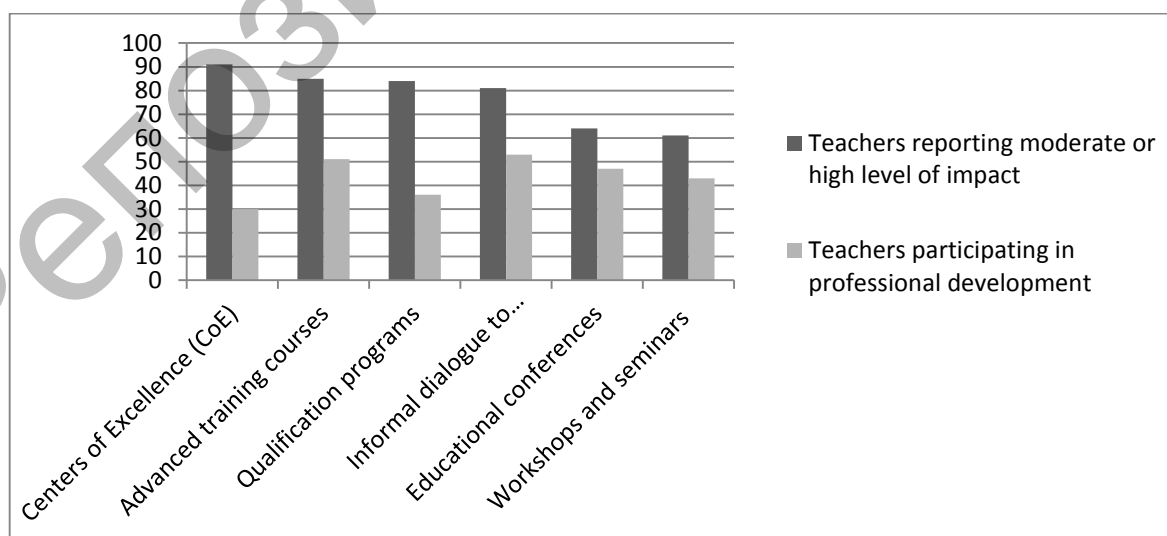
practice; but this remains all too rare. The existing teaching force can be supported through flexible approaches to career development and employment conditions [21].

In Kazakhstan, ongoing professional development already plays an important role. In different regions/oblasts of Kazakhstan, each teacher is expected to engage one month or more of professional development every five years to keep up with the rapid changes occurring in the world and to be able to improve their skills and knowledge [21].

More generally, the results presented below show that almost 40% of language teachers participated in some form of professional development over one month period and, on average, spent just under one day per month in professional development. However, there is considerable variation in the incidence and intensity of teacher participation in professional development. Activities are ranked in descending order of the percentage of teachers reporting a moderate or high impact of the professional development they took [21].

Figure 1.

Comparison of impact and participation by types of professional development activity (%)



According to the data of the study, today about half of all English language teachers working in primary schools are not able to take

professional development and advanced training courses in a timely manner, which has a general negative impact on the level of TEYL.



These conditions define an obvious need for the creation of an optimal model of professional development and advanced training of foreign language teachers taking into account the specifics of teaching in primary schools. Therefore, it becomes a goal of state importance to find new resources for professional development of the teachers to prepare them for a new professional activity such as TEYL [22, p.17].

The situation concerning both which materials are used to teach YLs, and their availability varies greatly. Teaching is going to be more efficient and will ensure a high level of achievement of students in the foreign language study, if the teachers are provided with modern teaching materials (programs, curriculum and instructional kits (CIK), methodological literature, etc.) [22, p.17].

One of the pressing problems in the sphere of teaching/learning foreign languages was related to methodological support of the educational process. To support curriculum and syllabus developments, a new policy on textbook production has been adopted since 2011. It was decided to create subject-specific curriculum and instructional kits (CIK) consisting of the following components: workbook, student's book, teacher's book, audio, didactic materials, methodological guidelines for teachers, etc. Attention was focused on the textbooks which logically hold a central position of CIK and are used as a standard work for the study of a subject.

The study revealed that there were a great number of complains about the quality of textbooks from the teachers; and there were several reasons for that. Firstly, the educational system of Kazakhstan was developed on the basis of the Soviet system of education, in which it was common practice to provide students with a lot of knowledge, and the textbooks reflected the situation.

Kazakhstani authors who have no experience in developing textbooks often make methodological

mistakes, which is naturally criticized by teachers and parents. It is evident that good textbooks cannot be developed in a year and many countries have many decades of experience in creation, evaluation and adaptation of textbooks. Furthermore, the materials were not adapted to fit the specific Kazakhstani context whilst also being grounded in rigorous research evidence and practical teacher education experience.

Our country is only accumulating such experience. In recent years a series of positive measures were undertaken in order to improve the quality of textbooks. For example, the Uchebnik (Textbook) Republican Research and Practical Center (RRPC) and the state system for expert evaluation of the quality of school textbooks were established. The system of multistage expert examination of the quality of textbooks consists of the Department of the Ministry of Education, the Uchebnik RRPC, the National Academy of Education, and the Republican Council on the Quality of Textbooks. Well-known teachers, deputies of the Parliament, members of the Government, and representatives of the local executive bodies are involved in the work of the Council.

The content of the program and curriculum and instructional kit (CIK) is a very significant aspect, as young learners are going to use them to obtain basic knowledge and master the material. Their quality will determine how quickly and easily a child will be involved in the process of learning the foreign language, and what knowledge s/he is going to obtain before s/he gets to high school. Availability of quality course-books and teaching materials used in the educational process in accordance with SES of primary education is also one of the criteria to perform educational activities [22, p.17].

More recently, a number of local education departments and publishers have been collaborating with overseas publishers and

textbook writers in producing up-to-date learning materials. For instance, the most widely used textbook series, Primary Colours for Kazakhstan, are results of collaboration among Uchebnik (Textbook) Republican Research and Practical Center (RRPC) and Cambridge University Press. Compared with their predecessors, recent textbooks are more innovative, learner-centered and communicatively-oriented because of their incorporation of new conceptions of education and international developments in language education [1, p.5]. The big challenge, however, is to train classroom practitioners to use the new textbooks effectively. There is some evidence that as a result of outdated preservice preparation and inadequate in-service support, many teachers fail to understand the underlying principles of the textbooks and use them in traditional ways [6, p.66]. In addition, not all the teachers (35%) are fully provided with the methodological aids, and not all the students (26%) are provided with the course-books and workbooks. There is no required basis of the state language (Kazakh) to teach English (quality dictionaries, course-books, translated literature etc.). In our opinion, the lack

of suitable teaching and learning materials, that systematically and purposefully meet the modern objectives, content and technology of early learning the language, makes the process of language teaching and professional teacher training process not efficient enough [22, p.18].

The availability of teaching and learning materials helps to increase young learners' achievements in foreign language learning, but it is not the only factor. The importance of the way TEYL is used by the teachers has a significant impact on young learners' results. According to the survey, teachers do not use a large number or wide variety of activities in their classes. The teachers who advocate an early start emphasize the use of appropriate teaching techniques with children to reach the desired outcomes [8, p. 60]. These techniques involve activity-based teaching (NR, 2010) during which children learn by developing experiences with the language. Children learn indirectly as they focus on meaning rather than form [17, p. 45]. Table 1 presents activities for YLs used often at the lesson by the majority of teachers.

Table 1.

Activities that are used in primary schools by language teachers

| Activities | N=105 | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| | n | % |
| Children repeating after the teacher | 77 | 73.3% |
| Children reading out loud | 73 | 69.5% |
| Filling gaps/blanks in exercises | 67 | 63.8% |
| Role-play | 63 | 60.0% |
| Grammar exercises | 58 | 55.2% |
| Children memorizing words and phrases | 58 | 55.2% |
| Handwriting exercises | 54 | 51.4% |
| Playing games | 53 | 50.4% |
| Songs | 52 | 49.5% |
| Listening to tape-recorder/CD | 51 | 48.5% |
| Translation exercises | 51 | 48.5% |
| Activities on the computer | 47 | 44.7% |
| Watching videos/TV | 40 | 38% |

A number of 'traditional' activities were popular, including repeating after the teacher,

reading out loud, gap-fills, grammar exercises, and memorization of words or phrases. The



majority of teachers also used role play but role-plays can be used both for communicative, meaning-focused activities and for more drill-like, accuracy-focused activities. However, 'creative' activities were not frequently used, particularly games and songs. In the estimation of most teachers the creative activities are connected with certain difficulties such as stating the assignments, time consumed for their fulfillment and assessment. Other activities that at least 40 per cent of teachers reported using rarely or never were a mixture of traditional and creative: listening to a CD or tape-recorder, computer work, watching TV/videos. What is least surprising is the low report of children doing computer work. In many schools, computers remain a luxury and internet access is limited.

The use of optimal conditions: appropriately trained teachers, suitable learning materials, various tools and activities in teaching foreign languages enables better teaching and higher achievements by the learners. The analysis showed that the foreign language teachers in primary schools have a low level of professional development, are not fully provided with the methodological guides and use the limited number of teaching activities. A minor quality change is observed in the use of teaching activities. Considering such conditions of teaching, it is impossible to expect high achievements of learners in the foreign language field.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the current research are important as it gives insights about English teachers' ideas about the language policy of lowering the age for EL teaching and learning. It has examined what is behind the policy according to the teachers' views by identifying factors contributing to and problems in its implementation. Policy changes mandating the

earlier introduction of English are increasingly being implemented in Kazakhstan. Although research has suggested that age may have an effect as to the way a language is learned, age alone does not determine success in learning a foreign language. As various sociocultural contexts, government policies, and historical language practices will all impact the success or failure of TEYL, there is no single best way to implement English as a foreign for young learners. Rather, effective TEYL starts with a clear understanding of the following factors and how they relate to one another.

The reality check on the policy indicates that it was issued without sufficient preparation for implementation. In fact, the country was largely unprepared for a large-scale promotion of primary English education when the policy document was released [12, p.361]. Policy decisions on the starting age for teaching and learning of English need to take into account a large number of contextual and resource factors. There are conditions that are required, for example, the availability of teachers with a high level of proficiency in the target language and professional training, resources necessary to support new curriculum, teaching methodology geared to the learning needs of young children, as well as consistent and well-designed follow-up instruction in the Grades 1-4. At present, these conditions are largely missing in the Kazakhstani context.

As for the age at which compulsory English learning begins, the majority of the teachers are in favor of an early start in primary school. This inclination of language teachers to start FLL in the Grade 1 of the primary classroom show supportive evidence for the new education curriculum, which offers compulsory ELT at around the ages 6-7 at the Grade 1. Their responses indicate high consistency with the recent literature about the issue. On the issue, the



report prepared by European Commission (2011a) highlights the importance of early start of FLE explaining that children at early ages learn the language in an unconscious way.

The second issue relates to the teachers' professional development. Particular problems are the lack of staff teaching English to young learners and non-availability of conditions required for re-training and advanced development of the teachers. The situation concerning language teachers' professional development in Kazakhstan, really leaves much to be desired. Proficiency in the target language alone is not a sufficient qualification for TEYL. Teaching English to young learners requires specialized training for teachers and special methodology. Therefore, qualified teacher should not only demonstrate written and oral proficiency in the English language (regardless of native language), but should also demonstrate teaching competency. Teachers should have training in teaching English, as well as in the ways young students learn. Effective language teachers should themselves be successful and experienced learners. Just as important are teachers' personal attitudes toward continued education and learning and their willingness to model language learning for the students with whom they work. Language teachers should receive the necessary professional development from qualified EFL teacher educators. Analysis showed that about half of all foreign language teachers working in primary schools were not able to take professional development timely. Schools and public authorities should make a significant investment in teachers' professional development. Considering such shortage of qualified primary school English teachers, it is impossible to expect high achievements of learners in the foreign language field. The in-service training of teachers to teach young learners needs to be considerably strengthened.

The situation concerning both which materials are used to teach YLs and their availability varies greatly. Depending upon the curriculum and methodology employed, institutions need to be able to provide the type and level of resources necessary to support the curriculum. Support materials should be designed for both teachers and students with the appropriate cultural context of the country (Kazakhstan) in mind. Teachers' views on teaching materials revealed that teaching materials for students and teachers aligning with new requirements for primary school ELT were partially available. Teachers have found themselves with a lack of suitable materials, either because materials are not available [16, p.115]. Local textbook production containing the Kazakhstani cultural content has not necessarily been a satisfactory solution. As Hoque [9, p.63] points out, textbook writing committees are led by academics with little experience of teaching at the primary level. The solution has been to use cooperation between local publishers and overseas publishers and textbooks writers [11, p.17]. Even where books do exist, they may not be available to the children. Moreover, teachers may need training to use the new books, otherwise they continue to employ previous methods [14, p.170].

Where textbooks are inadequate, teachers often lack the time and expertise to develop appropriate materials [15, p.681]. Yet good materials may have an important role to play as they can become the 'de facto' curriculum. As Nur [20, p.168] points out, where there is a lack of qualified teachers, 'textbooks appear to have a strong positive impact'.

An expanded range of materials for teaching young learners is needed. Materials development and their use should become a key area for research and development in the field.



Materials need to be available in as many formats as possible to respond to local conditions.

Another important finding that is worth mentioning is related to the use of activities by teachers. The analysis showed that English language teachers in primary schools used the limited number of teaching activities. A number of ‘traditional’ activities were popular, but ‘creative’ activities were not frequently used. The ‘creative’ activities are connected with certain difficulties such as stating the assignments, time consumed for their fulfillment and assessment [22, p.18]. Meanwhile, the data may mean that the teachers do not take into consideration the learners’ “zone of proximal development”¹;

therefore, they do not always plan and consider the developing objectives for their lessons.

Future studies can also examine the policy in classroom settings—investigating how policy rhetoric is being translated into classroom reality. In addition, the pedagogical and sociopolitical impact of the policy—how it has affected ELT at the junior secondary school level and beyond and how it has affected students, primary schools, and Kazakhstani society—is worth further exploration. Findings of such studies, along with those of the present study, can contribute to a comprehensive evaluation of the policy and further insights into policy implementation that can best serve Kazakhstan needs for proficiency in English.

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