

Introduction

Kazakhstan realizes that multilingualism is of utmost importance in society today especially in order to make its educational system more competitive. Although the Kazakh and Russian languages are predominately used in that country, Kazakhstan's policymakers understand that because of globalization, proficiency in the English language is essential. To this end, then-President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev presented his idea of the use of three languages for the first time in 2006 in his speech at the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. In his 2007 annual address entitled "A New Kazakhstan in a New World," Nazarbayev proposed the gradual implementation of the "Trinity of Languages Program." In his 2008 address Nazarbayev declared that "the Government [of Kazakhstan] should accelerate the implementation of the Trinity of Languages Program and urgently improve the quality of teaching the Kazakh language as the state language that unites our entire society" (Nazarbayev, February 6, 2008). Moreover, in his 2011 address to the people of Kazakhstan entitled "Building the Future Together" Nazarbayev stated, "I always say that knowing three languages is essential for the success of every Kazakhstani. Our task is to raise the number of citizens speaking the state language up to 80% by 2017. I think by 2020 the number of Kazakhstanis speaking English should reach 20%" (Nazarbayev, January 28, 2011). In addition to this projected percentage of Kazakhstanis who will be speaking English, 100% of the population of Kazakhstan will be expected to speak the Kazakh language and 95% will be speaking Russian (Yeskeldiyeva and Tazhibayeva, 2015, p. 56). Thus, one of the most important goals of the Trinity of Languages Program is to have Kazakhstan's citizens be proficient in three languages: Kazakh, Russian and English with Kazakh defined as the state language, Russian as the language of interethnic communication and English as the language of international communication (Tussupbekova et al., 2018, p. 37).

Literature Review

The system of trilingual education reform in Kazakhstan was begun in 2011 and is projected to continue until 2020. It has called for significant changes in the grades in which primary and secondary school students learn subjects in Kazakh, Russian and English. For example, during academic year (or "AY") 2017-2018 phased introduction of trilingual subject

education began for fifth-grade students. The following year, AY 2018-2019, “History of Kazakhstan” was taught in Kazakh for sixth-graders, while “World History” was taught in Russian in all schools, regardless of their primary language of instruction. This year (AY 2019-2020) tenth- and eleventh-grade students will study chemistry, physics, biology and computer science in English (“Поэтапный переход на английский язык обучения в системе образования”).

When speaking about the advantages of the Trinity of Languages Program, experts maintain its greatest asset is that students will acquire language proficiency in Kazakh, Russian and English. This linguistic expertise will, in turn, allow Kazakhstan's young people “to be academically mobile and to freely navigate in international space, as well as in the culture, and the traditions of different peoples” (Nurpeisova & Azimbayeva, 2015).

Kazakhstan's policymakers understand that their country's future leaders need to be proficient in English not just to benefit themselves and their families, but also for the benefit of Kazakhstan as a whole and its economical development in particular. Researchers such as Seitzhanova et al. (2015), stress the fact that having English as the medium of instruction for various classes in Kazakhstan's schools and universities thanks to the Trinity of Languages Program will bring with it a plethora of advantages, which include: improved English for students, full participation in international communication, better preparation for the competitive labor market, thereby making it possible to achieve professional goals in Kazakhstan and abroad, higher ratings for universities and substantial grounds for regular professional training sessions for pedagogues who teach subjects in English (p. 76).

Research done by Tussupbekova et al. (2018) examined the language attitudes and views of students toward trilingual education. 63 students of non-linguistic specialties working toward earning bachelor, master and doctorate degrees took part in a questionnaire that collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The researchers concluded that Kazakh, Russian and English “fulfill expressive, unifying and integrative language functions, thanks to which each one presumes that the model of trilingual education enables students to become proficient in all language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking)” (Tussupbekova et al., 2018, p. 44). Commenting on the Trinity of Languages Program in general, Tussupbekova et al. ascertained that “it [the Trinity of Languages Program] makes it possible to adopt new techniques for

teaching Kazakh, Russian and English based on expressive, unifying and integrative language functions. Each language is considered as a variable and an alternative medium of instruction at a particular educational level in the educational system of Kazakhstan” (2018, p. 44).

Although the Trinity of Languages Program certainly seems like a brilliant idea and one that could certainly benefit Kazakhstan's future generations, skeptics argue that there are many potential problems that may occur when implementing such a drastic reform in education. In particular, they cite a lack of teachers who can teach courses in English especially in rural areas, problems with assessment of exams in English, student issues of a psychological and linguistic-pedagogical nature and a lack of requirements for graduates upon completion of the Trinity of Languages Program.

Without question, in order to teach subjects in English educators must know that language – especially grammar and the lexicon that is specific to their subject – well. However, experts such as Dr. Zhuldyz Smagulova, who teaches courses in such disciplines as Sociolinguistics and Second Language Acquisition at KIMEP University in Almaty, Kazakhstan, asserts that teaching in different languages cannot be effective if teachers do not know them at the proper level, are not familiar with the theory and practice of such teaching and do not have high-quality teaching materials (Asipat et al., 2017). Thus, she is of the opinion that the idea of introducing a system of trilingual education is somewhat premature.

One may argue that the government of Kazakhstan can simply offer English language courses to teachers who will start teaching their subject in English. However, is this even a realistic expectation of an educator with over 20 years of teaching experience? Anatoly Mazura, a physics teacher in Kazakhstan with over 30 years of teaching experience stated, “Teaching physics laws and rules in English terminology is already complicated. Then I guess I’ll just have to leave school. Not all children are able to learn in such a way. There are, of course, children who can learn material fast, but, on the other hand, there are children who need more time and if they all will be taught in English, it is unlikely that they will understand anything” (“The Impact of Trilingualism in Kazakhtan”). It is unlikely that Anatoly is the only teacher with such an opinion; presumably, there are other pedagogues who feel the same way as he does and who are also faced with a decision either to stay working at school or change their profession. If enough seasoned educators stop teaching, will the Kazakhstani government have enough time to prepare

a sufficient number of teachers to replace them? Will young teachers be willing to travel to distant villages and remote areas to teach in schools there? These are questions that as of yet remain to be answered.

Gabdrahman (2017) recommends that school and university teachers who will be teaching their courses in English should take classes to learn both English and the methods of teaching a foreign language, as this is “the only way to make a language integrated course effective” (p. 3). While it certainly seems important to receive training in both of these subjects, the question begs asking whether the role of a teacher of chemistry, physics, computer science, etc. will then change from that of a specialist of his or her discipline to that of a specialist in his or her discipline who can correctly use the English language. Moreover, should this specialist also become a quasi-English teacher and take time explaining English vocabulary and grammar to his or her students? Although one may immediately answer “yes, otherwise the students may not understand some of the material being presented” and this point is definitely valid, how then can a teacher of chemistry, physics or computer science be expected to cover the material for an entire class period if a large part of class time is devoted to teaching English grammar and/or vocabulary?

Yet another challenge that the implementation of the Trinity of Languages Program brings is assessing answers to examinations that are written in English. If, for example, a high school chemistry class is taught in English, then students would seemingly take their examinations in English as well. However, would the teacher be expected to correct the examinations based on the students' knowledge of the English language or their knowledge of the actual subject? Thus, one is left asking what, in this case, is really being tested? Students who understand chemistry well, but have difficulty with English grammar would most likely not do as well on examinations in English as they would in Kazakh and/or Russian.

This leads to yet another potential problem with the trilingual education reform: challenges with students may arise that stem from psychological and linguistic-pedagogical issues, in particular, their ability to learn and feel comfortable using a foreign language (i.e. English), the ease with which they can switch from one language to another and the level of previous training they have had learning English (i.e. for high school students who will be learning the sciences in English).

One major shortcoming of the Trinity of Languages Program, according to Gabdrahman (2017), is that it does not describe, list or name any precise requirements as to the skills and competencies that students who graduate from school should acquire because of the Trinity of Languages Program. Without clearly communicating what students should achieve by their graduation date, no proper course for the program can be designed.

Lastly, Seitzhanova et al. (2015) surmise that if English is the medium of instruction in schools and universities in Kazakhstan, additional problems may arise such as: a lack of literature for some courses that are taught in English, not enough professional training sessions for non-English-speaking teachers who are now required to teach their subject(s) in English, as well as a lowering of the status and inadequate development of the Kazakh language (p. 76).

Data and Methods

In order to better understand how several citizens of Kazakhstan regard the Trinity Language Program, I conducted qualitative research with 10 individuals from Almaty: six of them are instructors of Russian as a Foreign Language at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, two of them teach Kazakh as a Foreign Language at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, one respondent recently defended his doctoral dissertation at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Foreign Philology, and one participant teaches history in a high school. The participants range in age from 28-74. Two are male and eight are female. They all answered the following research questions:

- 1). Have you heard of the Trinity of Languages Program?
- 2). In your opinion, what are some advantages of the Trinity of Languages Program?
- 3). What do you consider to be some of its negative aspects?
- 4). Some experts regard this program highly, saying that thanks to the Trinity of Languages Program Kazakhstani students can improve their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. However, others are of a different opinion and think that teachers of physics, chemistry, biology and computer science do not know English well enough to teach their subject(s) in English. With which side do you agree? Why?

5). Do you think that students may have difficulty studying the sciences in English? If yes, which steps, in your opinion, should the government of Kazakhstan take so that the teachers who teach courses in the sciences in English have a better control of that language?

6). Since students will spend a great amount of time studying English and Russian, do you think it is possible that their command of Kazakh may worsen?

7). If yes, which steps should the government of Kazakhstan take in order to make sure that children's command of the Kazakh language does not worsen?

My goal for interviewing these individuals was to answer two research questions, namely:

1). What are the factors that contribute most significantly to the success or failure of the Trinity of Languages Program?

2). Keeping in mind the factors that will impact upon the ultimate success or failure of the Trinity of Languages Program, do the projected results of the program (i.e. to have Kazakhstani schoolchildren and university students be fluent in Kazakh, Russian and English) seem realistic? Why or why not?

Results

All of my interviewees confirmed that they had indeed heard of the Trinity of Languages Program.

With regard to my second question concerning the advantages of the Trinity of Languages Program, participants asserted that, in their opinion, it benefits not only Kazakhstan's young people, but also Kazakhstan itself. Respondents are of the opinion that, thanks to the Trinity of Languages Program, Kazakhstani youth will know not only Kazakh and Russian, but English as well. One participant stated that knowing Russian is important because "it is the essence of culture and every educated person should know it. It also enables people to communicate both within Kazakhstan where there are 120 nationalities and outside of its borders for those with family in Russia and other former Soviet countries." Knowing English is equally important because it is the language that is used internationally for reading, writing and speaking. Without question, knowledge of Kazakh is also essential, as it is intertwined with cultural and national identity.

Benefits to Kazakhstan's young people are not just linguistic, however. Participants also noted both personal and professional benefits for students who learn three languages in school. In particular, they mentioned that knowing Kazakh, Russian and English creates opportunities for youth to travel and study abroad at any university where one of those three languages is used. A diploma from a foreign university is, unquestionably, very beneficial for their future career. This exposure to several languages and other countries and cultures also broadens young people's worldview. Thus, according to the majority of my interviewees, if Kazakhstani young people know several languages, this can only be regarded positively, as one individual expressed by stating "a person lives as many lives as s/he knows languages."

Several participants also claimed that since tomorrow's leaders of Kazakhstan will be able to speak three languages, this will help that country because it will encourage the creation of an open economy and Kazakhstan will become "a more competitive player on the global market" and thus more attractive to foreign investors. Furthermore, one individual emphasized that there are many countries in the world with several official languages, which results in fewer problems because speakers of all languages feel equally comfortable.

One interviewee stated that she saw first-hand just how effective the Trinity of Languages Program actually is while serving on a committee to assess high school students' proficiency in three languages at a school where the program was piloted. She was impressed by their fluency and ease in switching between languages. This experience led her to conclude that the Trinity of Languages Program has a great deal of promise.

My participants were then asked to consider the disadvantages of the Trinity of Languages Program. One concern that several individuals mentioned is a lack of qualified specialists who can teach their subject (e.g. biology, chemistry, physics, etc.) in English. To alleviate this problem, one interviewee suggested having universities prepare not just English teachers, but rather specialists who can teach their discipline in English. Another respondent commented that many school teachers are upset that they have to pay for classes to learn English and do it within a short timeframe even though no formal program has been developed for their training sessions. Not only is this a financial burden for these educators, but it puts them under a great deal of pressure to quickly learn a new subject without clear guidelines as to how to do so.

Moreover, it is especially difficult for teachers who are near retirement age to have to suddenly start teaching their discipline in English.

One individual voiced concern that the Kazakh language may suffer because of the program. She stressed that Kazakh should get “as much attention” as Russian and English and every effort should be made so that one language doesn’t “swallow” another one especially Kazakh. She explained the importance of making sure Kazakh is not pushed to the background based on the fact that it “is our native language. It is our roots, our future, our past and our present.” Her colleague stated that he is against the Trinity of Languages Program because of the fact that, in his opinion, too many people who were born and raised in Kazakhstan do not know Kazakh well. Thus, he deems it more important that all Kazakhstani schoolchildren first learn Kazakh perfectly and then study subjects in Russian and English. To this end, he remarked “It is crucial that the Kazakhstani government start with teaching Kazakh, as it is an official state language.”

Several interviewees voiced concern about the program itself and different aspects that are related to it such as tests and materials. One individual remarked that the implementation of the Trinity of Languages Program is a long process, and, in a similar vein, another participant stressed that the key is to “implement the program correctly and little by little rather than with force.” With regard to shortcomings of the program having to do with tests and materials, one respondent noted that while some subjects are taught in schools in English, before finishing school all pupils in Kazakhstan must take the Unified National Examination in Russian. This has resulted in some students needing to find a tutor in order to learn the subject matter in Russian so that they can affectively prepare for and pass their exam. Additionally, textbooks, teaching materials and teaching aids have either not yet been developed at all, or are lacking in number.

Lastly, there is the fact that, as one respondent emphasized, schoolchildren who have difficulty learning languages may struggle in the Trinity of Languages Program because of the heavy workload that is placed upon them. After observing students in a pilot school where the Trinity of Languages Program was implemented, this interviewee became convinced that in a class of 30 students a maximum of five can master the information presented and easily learn languages. However, for the other 25 learning the material of the curriculum in just one language

is difficult enough to say nothing of mastering information that is presented in two other languages.

My fourth question had interviewees decide whether they thought that thanks to the Trinity of Languages Program Kazakhstani students can improve their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills or that teachers of the sciences do not know English well enough to teach their subject(s) in English. Participants' responses were varied with six individuals agreeing that teachers do not know English well enough to teach their subject(s) in English and four respondents agreeing partially with their colleagues or having a slightly different opinion altogether.

Several individuals who agreed that many school teachers of the sciences do not know English well enough to teach their discipline in English cited additional issues that, in their opinion, are as detrimental to the success of the Trinity of Languages Program as is a lack of qualified specialists. For example, one interviewee claimed that there are not enough classroom hours in schools in Kazakhstan for students to reach a basic proficiency level in their non-native language (i.e. Russian or Kazakh) and too much material is presented when pupils are just starting to learn a language. She illustrated this point by recalling how her daughter, a native Russian speaker, began first grade in Almaty in 1997 and was immediately placed into a beginning Kazakh language class. However, at the same time she was also required to take a class in Kazakh literature in which all of the texts were in Kazakh. Thus, this individual concluded that without a correct methodological approach the Trinity of Languages Program cannot hope to achieve success.

Another participant noted that not only should teachers have a rudimentary knowledge of English so that they can eventually achieve a higher proficiency level in that subject, but they also need time to learn vocabulary specific to the subject of their discipline. Moreover, specific methodology and systemization needs to be in place before certain school subjects can be taught in English. First and foremost, schoolchildren need to be taught conversational English and then after that they can start studying subjects in English based on their proficiency level. If this is not done, this respondent asserted, teaching some subjects in English will be very difficult.

Other opinions of interviewees focused on such points as the need to introduce the program slowly and be patient enough to wait 10, 15 or even 20 years to see the results of it, the

need for the government of Kazakhstan to be willing to make large financial investments for the sake of the program and remembering that while having students be fluent in three languages is excellent, teaching them English without any preparation is not. One respondent expanded upon this idea and explained “not every student needs to be proficient enough to understand the sciences on a scientific level. However, for those young people who want to keep studying in the fields of science it is excellent that Kazakhstan creates conditions for them to receive such high-level knowledge in school. After graduation they can keep on improving their knowledge.” As far as the age at which Kazakhstani schoolchildren should start studying English, one respondent claimed, for example, that it is important for English classes to begin when children are “as young as possible, even in preschool because the earlier they get used to hearing a language, the earlier they get used to using it.” The idea of learning subjects in three languages at a very young age is something that her colleague is, however, against, arguing “it’s not a good idea to start teaching children subjects in all languages at a young age because they will end up being confused.”

Regarding the fifth question I posed to my interviewees, “Do you think that students may have difficulty studying the sciences in English? If yes, which steps, in your opinion, should the government of Kazakhstan take so that the teachers who teach courses in the sciences in English have a better control of that language?,” six individuals answered “yes,” two responded with “no” and two had difficulty answering. Several participants thought that the Kazakhstani government should offer training sessions and/or refresher courses in English-speaking countries for teachers of the sciences who will teach their discipline in English under the Trinity of Languages Program so that Kazakhstani teachers could visit the classes of their foreign colleagues who teach physics, biology, chemistry and computer science. By so doing, pedagogues from Kazakhstan would not only improve their English language skills, but also gain invaluable experience from foreign educators.

One individual voiced the opinion that the Kazakhstani government needs to take a serious look at the methodology behind the way that the sciences are taught in English. For example, it is important that students are taught material in the sciences according to their proficiency level in English. However, before this can happen textbooks need to be written in English for each discipline that are appropriate to students’ English language proficiency level.

The government of Kazakhstan should also take steps to thoroughly prepare teaching specialists of the scientific disciplines who are highly proficient in English. In order to achieve this goal, it is vital that tomorrow's teachers receive a thorough knowledge of English when they are still in school because, as one interviewee remarked, "everything starts with school." When they enter the university, these future pedagogues can then improve their command of the English language. However, it is crucial that they are not only proficient in the English language, but that they can teach their scientific discipline in English as well. One way to produce highly qualified specialists, according to one interviewee, is to open departments in universities where students would be trained solely for the purpose of teaching their scientific discipline in English. Thus, they would be able to teach not just the English language, but physics, chemistry, biology or computer science *in English*.

Currently, the Kazakhstani government is trying to help its teachers get used to working in a new system by implementing innovative courses and encouraging teachers to participate in them by offering them an increase in salary for doing so. While this is a noteworthy measure and one which my participants regard favorably, they also emphasize that much depends upon the teachers themselves and how they perform during courses and whether they are then willing to apply the new information they have learned in their own classes. Additionally, in order to teach the sciences in English pedagogues must be both highly educated subject teachers, i.e. specialists in their scientific discipline, and highly proficient in English so that they can incorporate what they learn in these courses into their teaching. If their command of English is only average, they should not, according to one interviewee, be teaching their discipline in English.

As stated above, two interviewees were of the opinion that students would not have difficulty studying the sciences in English, which one individual explained by noting that students in Kazakhstan are used to learning English because they have a "sufficient number of English language classes." While her colleague agreed that students would be able to study the sciences in English, she asserted that such study would be possible only if students intensively study English at the introductory level from first through third grade. By the time they enter fifth grade they would then have not only a satisfactory knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, but they would also have somewhat learned how to actually think in English. This type of gradual introduction of the English language would prevent them from feeling

overwhelmed as very young learners and provide them with a firm foundation on which to build their future knowledge of English.

Finally, several respondents also stated that much time is needed for students to gain proficiency in English, as this is a long process and one that cannot be rushed. Similarly, it will also take time to see the results of the Trinity of Languages Program; only after an entire generation of students who participated in the program from the first grade grow up will it be evident whether the program has been effective and to what degree.

When asked to comment on the sixth question, “Since students will spend a great amount of time studying English and Russian, do you think it is possible that their command of Kazakh may worsen?,” four interviewees answered “yes,” five “no” and one replied with “maybe.”

One individual who agreed that students’ command of Kazakh may regress as a result of also studying subjects in Russian and English explained her response by claiming that Kazakh will most likely now “get pushed to the background” and “be forced to take a backseat to Russian and English.” Another participant who speaks Kazakh at home with his family stated that his young daughter who is just beginning to speak has been learning Russian thanks to cartoons and children’s programs that are broadcast in Kazakhstan in Russian. Thus, he concluded that given the accessibility of Russian, both outside and on television, children in Kazakhstan can easily learn Russian just by turning on the television or playing with their peers on the playground. In his opinion, however, Kazakhstani children hear the Kazakh language less frequently on television and in social settings. Therefore, since it is constantly available to them in many spheres, there is a greater likelihood that with time their knowledge of Kazakh could indeed regress. Two other respondents who also answered “yes” to this question thought that it would behoove the Kazakhstani Ministry of Science and Education to teach more classes in Kazakh because students need to hear and learn to use academic, not just colloquial, Kazakh. However, this will not happen if most of their school subjects are taught in Russian and English. Moreover, more money needs to be allotted to fund Kazakh Language Departments in schools and universities.

Among those interviewees who answered “no” to this questions, two individuals replied similarly, stating that Russian and Kazakh are neither competing, nor does knowing one of them negatively impact upon the other. Moreover, knowing several languages enriches one’s

worldview. Since our world today is open, children need to learn several languages, as the more languages you know, the better. This cannot hurt children, but rather help them, as having a strong command of several languages will make their life easier in the future. Additionally, perhaps in several years' time knowing three languages will not even be enough.

Another individual who answered “no” to this question clarified her opinion by asserting that presently in Kazakhstan there are more ethnic Kazakhs, more Kazakh schools and university departments specializing in Kazakh and more specialists whose first language is Kazakh teaching in schools and universities. Many parents in Kazakhstan, she contends, associate their children's future with the country's future; they are, therefore, sending their children to Kazakhstani kindergartens and schools. Hence, she does not worry that students' knowledge of Kazakh will regress.

Two other respondents voiced concern over the future of the Russian language and worry that it, and not Kazakh, may in fact suffer both because of schools having more content hours for learning Kazakh, and because of the number of children who are moving from Kazakhstani villages to cities and are bringing with them a strong command of Kazakh, but poor command of Russian. Moreover, since every citizen of Kazakhstan is now required to know Kazakh, parents are not sending their children to Moscow and St. Petersburg as they did 30-40 years ago in the Soviet era, but instead making more of an effort to help them learn Kazakh well. As a result, these participants contend, a focus on being proficient in Russian is slowly disappearing.

The one interviewee who responded to this question by stating “maybe” stressed that everything depends upon the family and the language that the family speaks. If, for example, the family speaks Kazakh, the child's knowledge of this language will not worsen because in Kazakhstan “the family unit is extremely important” and much time is spent with grandparents. If, on the other hand, the family speaks Russian, then the parents should take definite steps to make sure the child can speak Kazakh well. She suggested that parents hire a Kazakh-language tutor for their Russian-speaking child or immerse the child in a Kazakh-speaking environment such as a district or a village where only Kazakh is spoken, which would thus force the child to use the Kazakh language.

My seventh and final question was “If you do think that students' knowledge of Kazakh may regress, which steps should the government of Kazakhstan take to keep that from

happening?” The four interviewees who thought that Kazakhstani children may indeed lose proficiency in the Kazakh language provided responses to this question. One respondent indicated that the Kazakhstani government should take the following steps to keep students' proficiency in Kazakh strong: provide textbooks in Kazakh, translate world literature into Kazakh so that children can read world-famous authors in Kazakh, as well as provide kindergartens, schools and universities in Kazakhstan with plenty of state-of-the-art equipment.

Another participant argued that the government of Kazakhstan needs to change the structure of the Trinity of Languages Program so that material for one subject is taught one day in Kazakh, the next day in Russian and the third day in English. By so doing, she asserts, all school children would definitely understand the material being taught.

Finally, two other respondents both emphasized the need for all people in Kazakhstan to first learn Kazakh well and only after that should the government of Kazakhstan implement the Trinity of Languages Program. One participant even focused on the need for a law requiring that all documents be in Kazakh and that knowledge of that language be required to apply for a job. Without such a law, plans to carry out the Trinity of Languages Program are, in her opinion, premature.

Conclusion

Without question, the Trinity of Languages Program, if successful, will benefit not only Kazakhstan's young people for whom countless doors will be opened both educationally and professionally, but also Kazakhstan itself both politically and economically. There are, however, several factors that play a crucial role in determining the future success of this program.

In response to my first research question, “What are the factors that contribute most significantly to the success or failure of the Trinity of Languages Program?,” my interviewees identified a variety of components that must be addressed to ensure that the Trinity of Languages does not bring about dire consequences for educators and students alike. One such issue that my respondents mentioned repeatedly is the lack of qualified specialists in Kazakhstan today who can teach their scientific discipline in English. This especially holds true both for teachers in rural areas, and for teachers who are nearing retirement age.

Another topic that needs to be addressed has to do with students themselves. Namely, what is the age at which it is best to begin teaching students in three languages, one of which (i.e. English) is truly a foreign language for them? Some individuals argue “the younger, the better,” while others contend that presenting information to the young mind in three languages will only cause confusion. Additionally, how will schools go about teaching subjects in three languages to those students who have difficulty learning course material in just one language? While it is true that learning languages comes easily for some, this is not true for everyone. Most certainly the success or failure of the Trinity of Languages Program also depends upon whether all students, not just a select few, can understand and apply the course material that is taught to them in Kazakh, Russian and English.

Issues related to the language in which a subject is taught and the language in which it is tested may also affect whether the Trinity of Languages Program is successful or not. Specifically, subjects that are taught in schools in Kazakhstan in English are then tested in Russian for the Unified National Examination. As a result, students are forced to relearn subject material in Russian or risk doing poorly on one specific test not because they do not know the subject material, but rather because they did not learn it in Russian.

Several of my interviewees adamantly stated that whether or not the Trinity of Languages Program achieves success depends on how much attention is paid to the Kazakh language and not letting it get pushed aside by Russian and English. If this happens, they claim, the program will be unsuccessful in producing students who can speak and write in Kazakh at an academic, and not just colloquial level.

Due to the fact that the Trinity of Languages Program is slated to be a long and arduous process, another element that will contribute to its success or lack thereof is whether the government of Kazakhstan and its citizens are patient enough to wait perhaps as many as 20 years to see how effective it is. The Kazakhstani government also needs to be prepared to shoulder a large financial burden to fund the program. Whether or not it is able to do so will play an enormous role in the successful realization of the Trinity of Languages Program.

With regard to my second research question, “Keeping in mind the factors that will impact upon the ultimate success or failure of the Trinity of Languages Program, do the projected results of the program (i.e. to have Kazakhstani schoolchildren and university students

be fluent in Kazakh, Russian and English) seem realistic? Why or why not?,” if the government of Kazakhstan takes concrete steps to remedy the issues that may impact upon the actual success of the Trinity of Languages Program, I think that the program does indeed have realistic goals. However, in order for them to be realized, the Kazakhstani government first needs to take several steps.

First, training sessions and courses need to be offered for teachers of the sciences preferably in English-speaking countries, which would allow them to learn how these subjects are taught by native English speakers. If this measure would prove to be too costly, native English-speaking teachers of the sciences could be brought to Kazakhstan and teach their colleagues English-language vocabulary specific to their discipline. More emphasis also needs to be put on communicating with teachers, as they are one of the main groups whom the Trinity of Languages Program affects the most. Jones, Potter and Ebrahim (2001) point out, for example, that educators should be given the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions about what does and does not work for them because only a shared approach will bring about effective change.

Second, in order to help young children learn English more effectively, they could intensively learn conversational English from first through third grade and then begin studying subjects in English in fifth grade after their proficiency level has improved. In addition, textbooks should be written for each discipline that is taught in English and geared toward the students' English-language proficiency level.

Third, to provide assistance to those students who have difficulty learning subjects in three languages, schools could provide after-school tutoring sessions so that they would not fall behind in their studies.

Fourth, departments should be opened in universities to train individuals to become teachers of their scientific discipline in English. By so doing, there would not just be teachers of chemistry or teachers of English, but rather English-language chemistry teachers.

Finally, to ensure that students' knowledge of Kazakh does not regress, textbooks should be provided in Kazakh and world literature should be translated into that language. Moreover, it would behoove the Kazakhstani government to broadcast more television programs, especially children's programs, in Kazakh.

Kazakhstan's Trinity of Languages Program – A Model of Success or Failure?
Central Eurasian Studies Society Conference
Jill Neuendorf
Georgetown University

While the Trinity of Languages program is definitely a brilliant idea in many ways, the government of Kazakhstan needs to do more to ensure that it can reach its full potential in order to make today's students tomorrow's leaders of Kazakhstan.

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