Students' Perception and Attitudes towards Implementation of Multilingualism in a University

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Abstract
The Republic of Kazakhstan has introduced a state level trilingual program, with the Kazakh, Russian and English languages, to promote linguistic diversity in the context of globalization, multilingualism and integration. This study aims to explore the attitude of students of multilingual programs to the use of multilingualism at a prestigious university in the western region of Kazakhstan as a criterion of how effectively the new trilingual policy is being implemented in Kazakh higher education. The study sample comprised 64 first- and second-year Kazakh multilingual students specializing in teaching exact sciences. Using a mixed method research design involving quantitative and qualitative analyses of responses to the questionnaire developed specifically for this study, findings suggest that, despite students' understanding of the significance and necessity of multilingualism in their future profession and the university authorities' promotion of multilingualism at the university, it is still too early to speak about the success of the state trilingual policy in higher education. Although students of multilingual programs generally look positively at multilingualism, they seem to fail to understand clearly how the Kazakh, Russian and English languages can be integrated in the study of a specialized subject and what actual possibilities their integration can offer for effective communication in the classroom. Suggestions to increase the effectiveness of the multilingualism in education are made including applying the translanguaging perspective and developing multilingual online reference materials.

Keywords: Multilingual Education, Translanguaging, Higher Education, Linguistic Diversity, Kazakhstan.

Introduction

In this world dominated by globalization and cultural diversity, multilingual education is an extremely relevant and sought-after concept in higher education. Intercultural communication and multilingualism are key elements in the preparation of modern specialists who are able to function successfully in a multinational and multicultural environment. In addition, multilingual education offers broad prospects in a modern world where borders are becoming less significant (Duarte et al., 2023). Within the framework of multilingual education, where parallel learning of several languages is carried out, features arise in communication that require special attention and adaptation of the educational process (Henry, Thorsen, & MacIntyre, 2024). Besides, sociocultural contexts being complex, multilingual educational environments present unique challenges and opportunities for effective communication (Malakar & Datta, 2023).

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, the governmental program "Trinity of Languages" has been implemented in response to the emerging demands for linguistic diversity (Delovarova & Gaipov, 2019). The program is being influenced by country's entry into the globalized space and expanding its scale of international relations (Kurmanova et al., 2023). In accordance with this governmental program, education is also regarded as "a conveyor belt" in the construction of a multilingual society (Agbo et al., 2022) with speakers required to be fluent in three languages: Kazakh (a state language), Russian (a language of interethnic communication) and English (a language of international communication) (Polatova et al., 2020). Therefore, the trilingual policy in Kazakhstan is realized through multilingual educational programs aimed at training competitive specialists who are professionally fluent in these three languages (Zhumay et al., 2021).

Hidalgo & Ortega-Sánchez (2023) claim that recent research on multilingualism in education has mainly focused on language benefits for multilingual students and has not made enough attempts to explore progress towards quality multilingual education. This caused us to wonder whether the new trilingual policy in Kazakhstan has been effective in ensuring that the Kazakh, Russian and English languages have become more widely implemented in higher education, or whether an illusion of multilingualism has been created, in which one language may still be clearly favored over the others (House, 2003). One of possible ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the multilingual policy is to explore students' attitudes and beliefs on multilingualism as simultaneous use of several languages in an educational process. Moreover, despite the rising interest in students' attitudes to multilingualism in education, little attention has been given to how students of multilingual educational programs in Kazakhstan view the simultaneous functioning of the Kazakh, Russian and English languages in the educational process.

Although the Kazakhstan governmental has implemented the "Trinity of Languages" program, little is known about its success and how effectively this program has been able to meet the demands of linguistic diversity. The current study seeks to address this literature gap by exploring the attitudes of Kazakh university students to the use of multilingualism in higher education. This study looks at students' attitudes to multilingualism as a criterion to determine the effectiveness of the new trilingual policy in Kazakhstan as implemented in university multilingual programs. Exploring students' attitudes and beliefs towards multilingualism at university would also enable a deeper understanding of communication in a multilingual educational environment in Kazakhstan in terms of students' linguistic and academic achievements (Baa, Maghfirah, & Borland, 2023). This study would offer possible ways of reaching and supporting their success in multilingual education (Moorhouse & Wan, 2023), and offer useful insights to educators, as well as politicians, working in multilingual settings to promote balanced multilingualism.

Literature Review

Recently, there have been a number of investigations into the multilingual educational context in Kazakhstan, however they are mostly limited to the description of the new trilingual policy introduced in the country or examined theoretical considerations connected with the implementation of this policy in education. For instance, Balgazina (2020) and Rosen (2023) considers the issues of reforming the educational system in Kazakhstan, and informs that the main idea of the governmental policy is to develop the state language, preserve the Russian language and actively learn English. In this way, the state language, the Kazakh language. is expected to play a fundamental role serving as the foundation for the spiritual development of society. Similarly, Kakimova & Kubegenova (2020) and Tiza et al. (2023) stress the important role of communicative universals in the learning process of linguistic university students as an effective tool for developing their multilingualism and offer practical recommendations for their implementation in the educational process. In another study, based on the result of a survey conducted among university students, teachers and administration, Daurenbekova et al. (2020) and Al Doghan (2022) focus on benefits provided by multilingual education. According to their findings, multilingual education contributes to an increase in motivation and interest in learning various languages, more successful performance in coping with assignments in different languages and a deeper understanding of the content of the educational materials.

Recently, there has been a growing large number of studies focusing on students' perceptions and attitudes to multilingualism in education in various contexts. Thus, Nureldeen et al. (2024) elicited Egyptian and Saudi students' viewpoints on reading in Arabic and English, which reveal the complexity and significance of the emotional aspects of multilingual reading. In another study, having analyzed Moroccan multilingual learners' responses, Benzehaf (2023) came to a conclusion that in multilingual education students can increase open-mindedness and flexibly develop multiple identities as being "modern, global, open and intercultural citizens" (p. 1). A few studies have also been devoted to students' attitudes to multilingualism from emotional and cognitive dimensions in minority areas. For example, Shi & Cui (2020) and Muthuswamy (2023) identified some differences in college students' attitudes towards the Chinese, Korean, English, Japanese and Russian in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture with regards to such factors as gender, grade, major and ethnicity. Yue & Fan (2022) found a significant influence of students' language proficiency level on their attitudes towards multilingualism within the Li minority group in Hainan, China.

In some European contexts, investigations deal with students' views on benefits provided by multilingualism. For instance, the findings of Wappa and Gilanlioglu's (2024) research into the attitudes of engineering students in North Cyprus demonstrate that multilingual students benefit from their linguistic and cultural exposure and have opportunities to fit perfectly into the globally diverse labor market. The quantitative analysis by Haukås, Storto, & Tiurikova (2024) showed that among the main potential benefits of multilingualism Norwegian students noted increasing language awareness, effectively learning languages and flexibility to shift perspectives and interact in an increasingly mobile and diverse world.

Fashanu, Wood, & Payne (2020), Ghaleb & Sundram (2024) and Ye & Wang (2023) empirically explored how a multilingual environment affects the development of language and communication in children at an early age and how this affects the educational process. The results of their study suggest that, despite the marginalization of multilingual practices in the English school, multilingual children challenge the idealization of English in school by managing a spatial agency in which they find opportunities in peripheral and liminal spaces to speak their native language. The findings from another study on trilingualism in Zimbabwe by Nhongo & Siziba (2022) and Matrood, Khudhair, & Oudah (2023) showed that challenges might arise in multilingual education that are related to balancing languages in situations characterized by linguistic inequalities in multilingual environments. The authors propose to distinguish between situations when students speak different second languages and when these languages have different statuses. Hence, it is evident that the status of a language in educational process can make a big impact on multilingual communication.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, when a study on attitude is carried out, it is important to first define the concept of attitude. Attitudes are defined as "the tendency to learn to respond consistently favorably or unfavorably with respect to a given object" (Kroll, 2004) or attitudes are dispositions "to react favorably or unfavorably to a class of objects" (Garret, 2010). Such a definition emphasizes that attitudes comprise positive and negative emotional responses towards a given object. Attitudes are also seen as self-descriptions and perceptions (Baker, 1992) and evaluative orientations to social objects, such as languages (Garret, 2010). Attitudes can be influenced by factors such as age, language ability, language background, cultural background (Baker, 1992; Kang, Chaivirutnukul, & Zeng, 2023). It has been shown that as age increases, language attitudes tend to become less favorable. By contrast, language attitudes tend to become more favorable when individuals demonstrate higher language ability, when they are exposed to various languages in their family and social environment and when they have access to various cultural events and activities.

Another theoretical underpinning is that social communication is central to any sphere of multilingual education. Mustayeva, Kasimova, & Farkhutdinova (2020) explored the issue of social communication among students in the context of a bilingual learning environment. The authors analyze how the language environment influences communication processes among students, and pay attention to the interaction between different language groups and its impact on social relationships and identity formation. Based on empirical data and analysis of existing literature, the authors draw conclusions about the importance of social communication in the context of bilingual education and describe the features of the use of different languages in different situations and its influence on the effectiveness of learning and mutual understanding between students.

The theoretical perspective of multilingual identity is that psychological and sociological constructs can be connected with factors as language use, habits, open-mindedness, future multilingual self and beliefs about multilingualism. For this reason, language-learning multilingual classroom is often viewed as a key site for constructing students' multilingual identities (Forbes & Rutgers, 2021), particularly when the supremacy of English as a second language or a dominant language of instruction impacts students' identities (Sahr, 2020). A plain truth is that, unlike many European or Asian countries, the Republic of Kazakhstan does not have conditions for the natural development of mass multilingualism with the active functioning of the English language, and hence it is difficult to determine whether multilingualism can contribute to shape students' identities, unless students' attitude and perception towards multilingualism is understood.

Based on these theoretical constructs, it is now easy to portray a real picture of the implementation of the model of trilingual education officially accepted in Kazakhstan, whose main feature is that it is characterized by the functioning of three languages with different statuses, the dominant languages being Kazakh and Russian (Kurmanova et al., 2023). It is now required to examine, specifically in the context of Kazakh education system, whether a new model of multilingual education, making it mandatory to master the Kazakh, Russian and English languages, would create favorable conditions for successful integration of educational disciplines like science and technology, and whether it would help preserve national and ethnic identity as well (Nurlanova, Oskolkova, & Chunkurova, 2022).

The study, therefore, framed the following research questions to explore students' attitudes towards multilingualism in higher education:

1. Do students support multilingualism in classrooms?
2. What do students feel about learning three languages simultaneously in a multilingual classroom?
3. What are the actual proportions of languages learnt in a multilingual classroom?
4. Are there any preferences for learning particular languages in a multilingual classroom?
5. How do students view the role of the university administration in the realization of the trilingual policy?

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted an embedded mixed method research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The quantitative and qualitative research data were collected and analyzed in a traditional way through the questionnaire containing closed-ended and open-ended questions enabling quantitative and qualitative analyses of the participants' responses, respectively. A university in the western area of Kazakhstan was the research setting for this study, which offered multilingual undergraduate programs in technical, natural and social sciences.

Sampling and Research Procedure

The research sample comprised 64 undergraduate students aged between 17 and 20 years studying in multilingual groups, studying the subjects of mathematics and physics, in the first and second years at K. Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University, Kazakhstan. Table 1 demonstrates the frequencies (percentages) of the demographics such as gender, age, major, year of studies and native tongue of the research sample.

Table 1: *The Demographic Profile of The Sample.*

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	45	70.3%
Male	19	29.7%
Age		
17 years	12	18.8%
18 years	35	54.7%
19 years	15	23.3%
20 years	02	3.2%
Major		
Teaching Mathematics	27	42.2%
Teaching Physics	37	57.8%
Year of studies		
First year, Bachelor degree	38	59.4%
Second year, Bachelor degree	26	40.6%
Native tongue		
Kazakh	62	96.8%
Russian	01	1.6%
Uzbek	01	1.6%

The study preferably sampled students from similar educational backgrounds (specializations) and aimed at a more or less equal distribution by gender. Yet, the proportion of female participants (70.3%) appeared to be more than twice as large as the proportion of male students (29.7%). Such an uneven distribution of gender variables in the research sample can be explained by the general observation that the majority of students at K. Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University that choose educational programs in pedagogy are female. This also aligns with Lippa, Preston and Penner's (2014) observation that women normally tend to be employed in people-oriented occupations like teaching. Regarding the age variable, a majority of participants were 18 years old, thus making the average in the research sample equal 18.1. It is also important to note that the native tongue for almost all respondents was the Kazakh language.

Of utmost importance to the study of multilingualism in education is the level of the respondents' proficiency in three languages. In the first part of the questionnaire, the respondents chose their level for each language. It was found that a majority of respondents indicated that they had an advanced level of proficiency in the Kazakh language, while for Russian and English languages, a majority of responses indicated an intermediate level of proficiency in these languages, and pre-Intermediate and elementary levels were chosen as responses mainly in relation to the English language. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of variables referring to the level of proficiency in the Kazakh, Russian and English languages by the research participants.
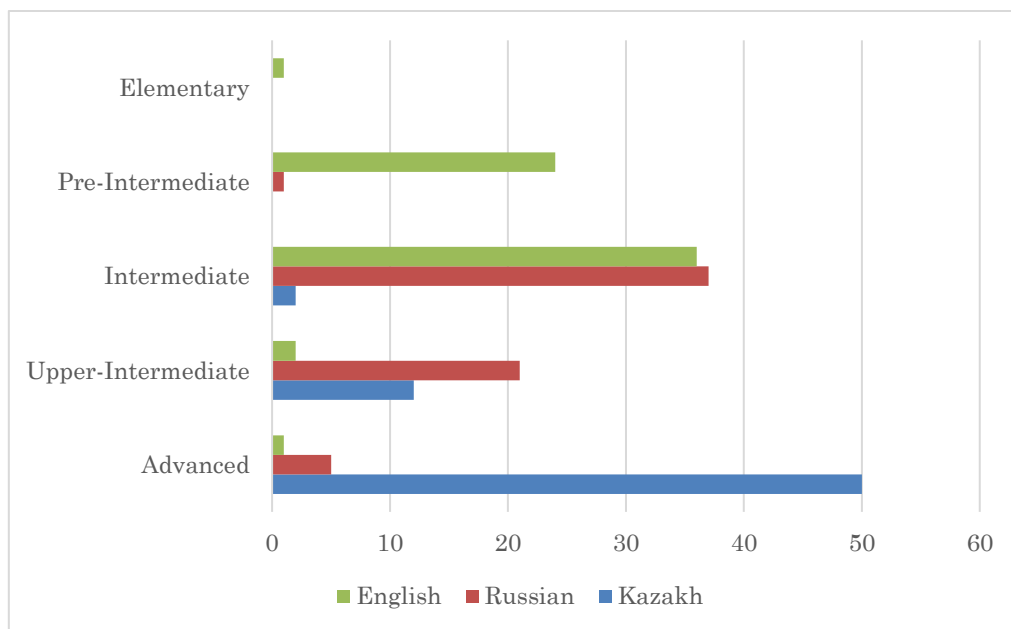

Figure 1: *Distribution of Participants by Proficiency Level in Three Languages.*

In the final question of the first part of the questionnaire, the respondents chose the form of multilingualism which they identify with. According to their responses, over a half (53%) identify with Kazakh-Russian or Russian-Kazakh bilingualism and over a third (36%) identify with Kazakh-Russian-English trilingualism. Only a few respondents think they are trilingual with Kazakh, English and Russian, or Russian, Kazakh and English. Only one person identifies with English-Russian bilingualism. Despite studying in a trilingual educational program, 54% respondents indicated bilingualism as their form of multilingualism. Figure 2 presents these findings in a graphical form.
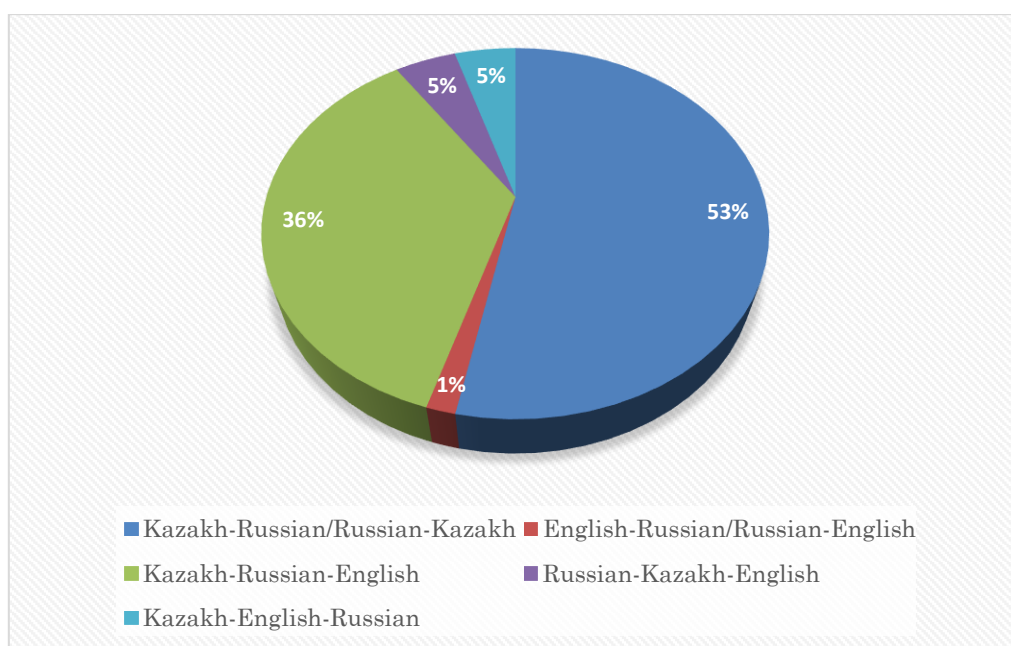

Figure 2: *Distribution by form of Multilingualism.*

Data Collection

The data for the present research were collected through the online questioning of students in Google forms. The questionnaire contained 47 closed-ended questions for the quantitative part, and 05 open-ended questions for the qualitative part, in the form of statements divided into five main sections. The variants of responses to the closed-ended questions were based on the Likert scale from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Detailed responses were expected from the participants to the open-ended questions in the qualitative part. In addition, informed consent was obtained from the respondents to take part in the research and to process their responses.

The first part of the questionnaire contained 10 closed-ended questions and aimed to collect the demographic information about the research sample (Questions 1 – 10). The second part was devoted to the specificity of language use in multilingual education and consisted of 8 closed-ended questions for the quantitative part (Questions 11 – 18), and one open-ended question for the qualitative part, welcoming detailed comments on the proportions of languages used in the classroom. The third part comprised 4 pairs of contrasting closed-ended questions (Questions 19 – 26) for the quantitative part, and one open-ended question for the qualitative part, focusing on the participants' quantitative preferences regarding multilingualism in class and attitudes to them. The fourth part contained 11 closed-ended items for the quantitative part (Questions 27 – 37), and one open-ended question for the qualitative part, dealing with the importance of multilingualism in education. The fifth part consisted of 8 closed-ended questions (Questions 38- 47) for the quantitative part, and two open-ended questions for the qualitative part, addressing psychological and methodological aspects of multilingualism in higher education).

Data Analysis

The quantitative data of the survey were analyzed by using the Google spreadsheets, which enabled the calculation of the frequencies and proportions of the responses to closed-ended items in the questionnaire. The interpretations of the respondents' answers to the closed-ended questions were based on a 5-grade Likert scale. The qualitative data of the questionnaire were analyzed by doing thematic analysis based on the deduction of the meanings in the respondents' detailed comments to the open-ended questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The qualitative analysis allowed us to identify the following themes: general need for multilingualism in education, the significance of multilingualism in the profession of a teacher, the importance of multilingualism in the learning of a subject, the availability of information in the three languages, the use of multilingualism in the educational process, difficulties in the learning process connected with multilingualism, the availability or lack of resources at the university, qualifications of teachers, availability of teaching materials, and management strategies at the university. The combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses allowed us to obtain reliable and trustworthy data about the students' attitudes to multilingualism in higher education in multilingual educational programs at a prestigious Kazakh university.

Results

The qualitative and quantitative analyses of research data enabled obtaining information on respondents' perception and attitude to implementation of multilingualism in their educational process. In their responses to closed-ended and open-ended questions in the online questionnaire, they speculated how they understood the importance of multilingualism, how they felt about using multilingualism, in what proportions languages were actually used in class, whether they had any language preferences and whether multilingualism was supported by university officials. The following two sections present the quantitative (proportionate) and qualitative (thematic) analyses of the responses gathered from the questionnaire.

Quantitative Analysis

Table 2 presents the students' views on the specific features of using the Kazakh, Russian and English languages in multilingual higher education. The majority of the respondents (about 61%) note that they often hear three languages simultaneously used in class. But at the same time, respondents' opinions are somewhat contradictory regarding the dominant language in multilingual communication in the classroom: slightly over 53% believe that the Kazakh language dominates in communication, while almost 52% are confident that the Russian language dominates, and more than 56% are convinced that English is the dominant language in the classroom. At the same time, three-quarters of the participants of the questionnaire believe that they often use all the three languages when communicating in class. The majority of the respondents (about 83%) agree and strongly agree that the three languages interact harmoniously in the classroom. They almost unanimously (95.3%) agree with the statement that for a student, multilingualism is an important skill in higher education. Besides, the absolute majority of respondents (81.3%) express confidence that mixing languages is natural for students of a multilingual educational program.

Table 2: *Language Use in Multilingual Education.*

	Questions	5	4	3	2	1
11.	I often come across the use of Kazakh, Russian and English in the same educational context.	15 (23.4%)	39 (60.9%)	6 (9.4%)	4 (6.3%)	0 (0%)
12.	The Kazakh language predominates in the educational process.	19 (29.7%)	34 (53.1%)	7 (10.9%)	4 (6.3%)	0 (0%)
13.	The Russian language predominates in the educational process.	10 (15.6%)	33 (51.6%)	11 (17.2%)	10 (15.6%)	0 (0%)
14.	The English language predominates in the educational process.	14 (21.9%)	36 (56.3%)	9 (14.1%)	5 (7.8%)	0 (0%)
15.	All three languages interact harmoniously in the educational process.	21 (32.8%)	32 (50%)	8 (12.5%)	3 (4.7%)	0 (0%)
16.	I often use all the three languages in the educational process.	18 (28.1%)	30 (46.9%)	10 (15.6%)	6 (9.4%)	0 (0%)
17.	I am sure that in an educational environment it is important for a student to be multilingual.	38 (59.4%)	23 (35.9%)	2 (3.1%)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)
18.	I am convinced that it is natural for a multilingual person to mix languages in an educational context.	17 (26.6%)	35 (54.7%)	9 (14.1%)	3 (4.7%)	0 (0%)

The next 4 pairs of closed-ended questions (Question No 19 to 26) on participants' language preferences were based on contrast and aimed to find out whether respondents understood what it meant to speak three languages at the same time. The responses turned out to be interesting, since sometimes the respondents clearly contradicted the general attitude of students towards multilingualism in the educational process. Thus, as revealed in Figure 3, while 46.9% believed that multilingual students should use three languages in the same situation, 65.6% identified a tendency to use only one language in the same situation.
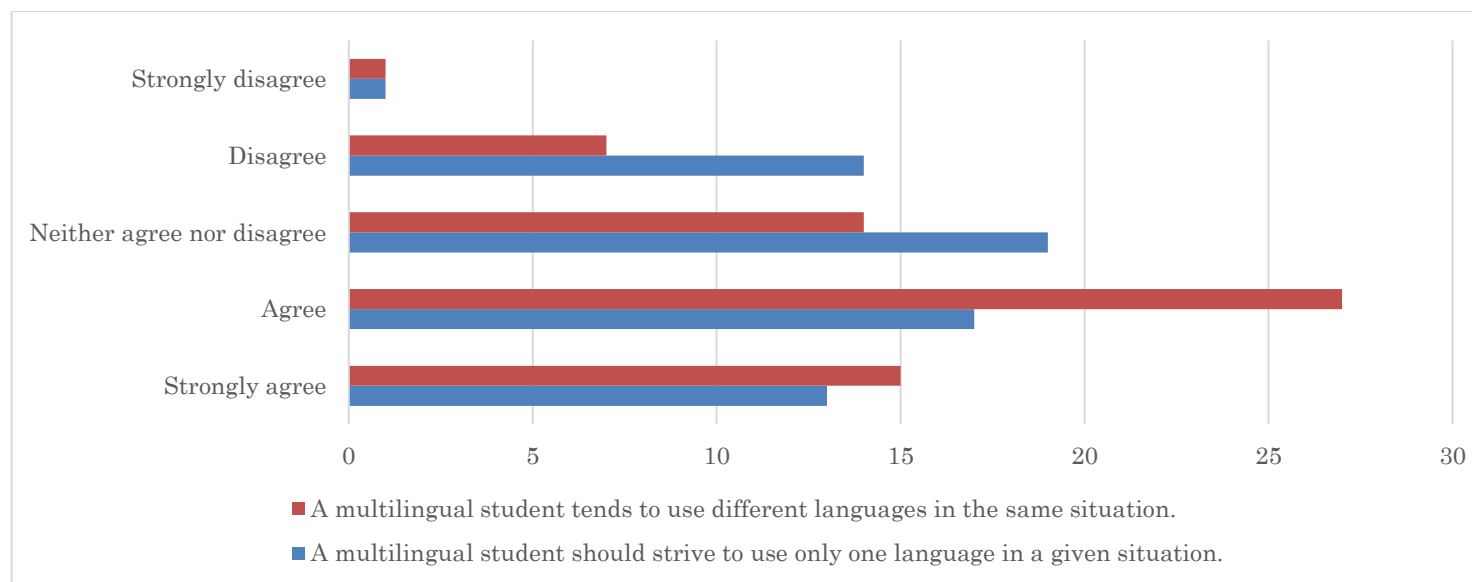

Figure 3: *A Multilingual Student's Quantitative Preferences.*

Moreover, the inconsistency of opinions was manifested in the contrasting pair of questions about the respondents' attitude to how many languages can be used simultaneously in the educational process. Interestingly, 64.1% of the respondents had a positive attitude towards hearing only one language spoken in the classroom, while almost the same number, 67.2%, treated positively the situations, when the three languages are utilized simultaneously, as seen in Figure 4.
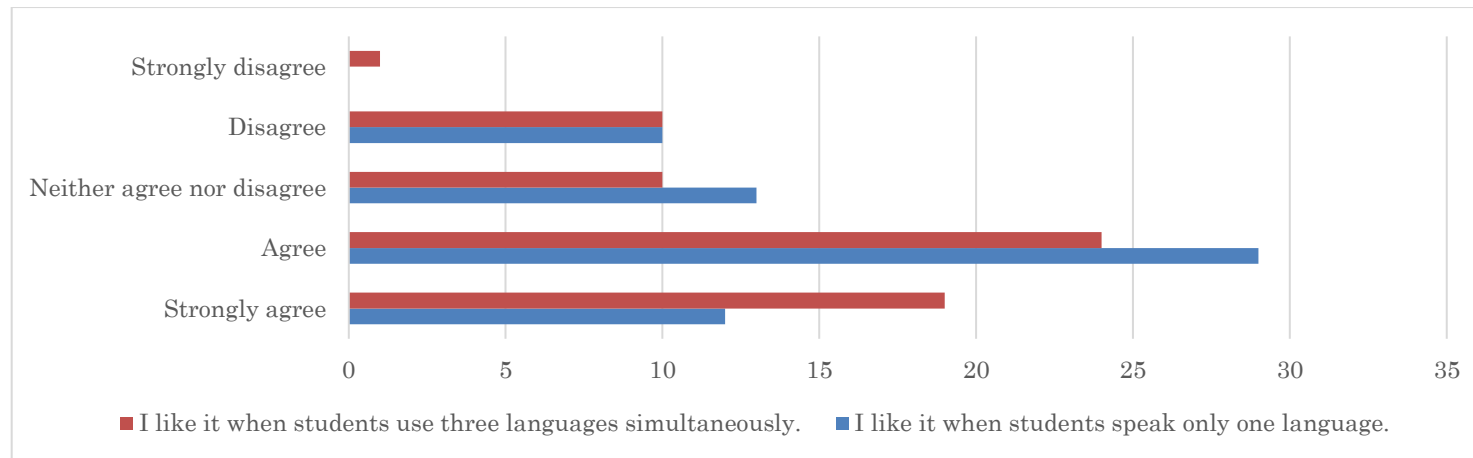
Figure 4: *Attitudes to Students' Quantitative Preferences.*

An almost similar situation manifests itself in the attitude of students to how many languages the teacher should speak during the lesson. A total of 54.7% of respondents expressed a positive attitude towards the situation when the teacher should speak only one language. At the same time, 68.8% liked it when the teacher used all three languages, the Kazakh, Russian and English, at the same time. In this pair of questions, as seen in Figure 5, more students show a greater preference for the multilingual situation, although the difference between the responses remained small. In addition, exactly the same number of students (25%) agreed with both statements.
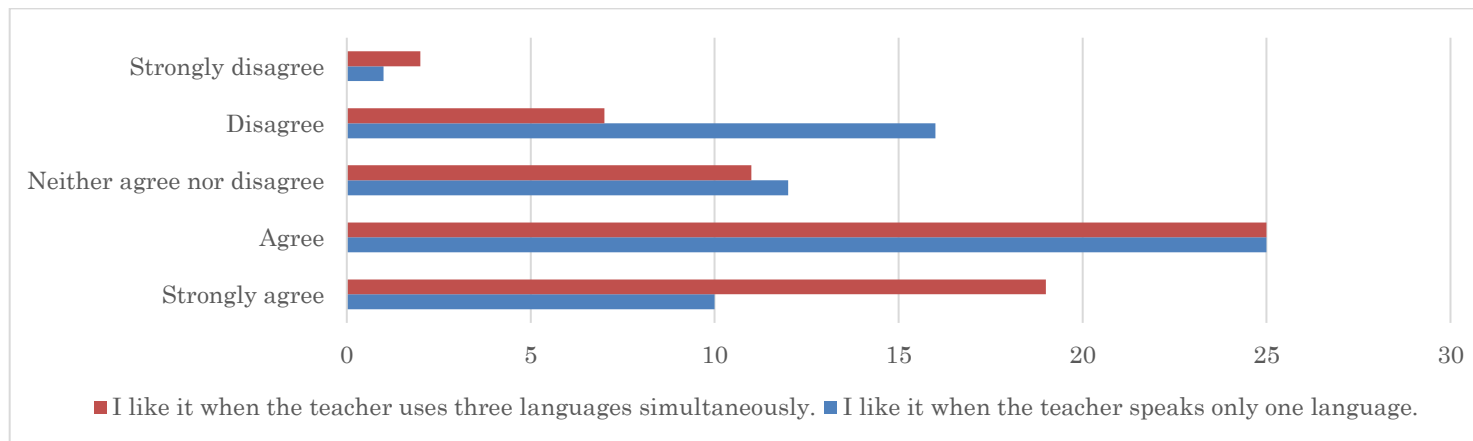

Figure 5: *Attitudes to Teachers' Quantitative Preferences.*

Mixed opinions were also given to the next pair of questions about which situation was more characterized by multilingualism. Interestingly, (68.7%) participants responded that the simultaneous functioning of three languages was more typical of informal situations in an educational context, i.e. in interpersonal communication between students. Only 59.4% agreed that the simultaneous functioning of three languages is more characteristic of formal situations in an educational context, when communication takes place with a teacher or the administration. In accordance with these responses, as seen in Figure 6, it can be assumed that multilingualism is used in education at two levels – at the level of interaction between students (informal communication) and at the level of interaction between students and the teacher (formal communication). Since both types of situations can be involved in the course of the same lesson, the lack of a clear distinction between situations is quite possible.
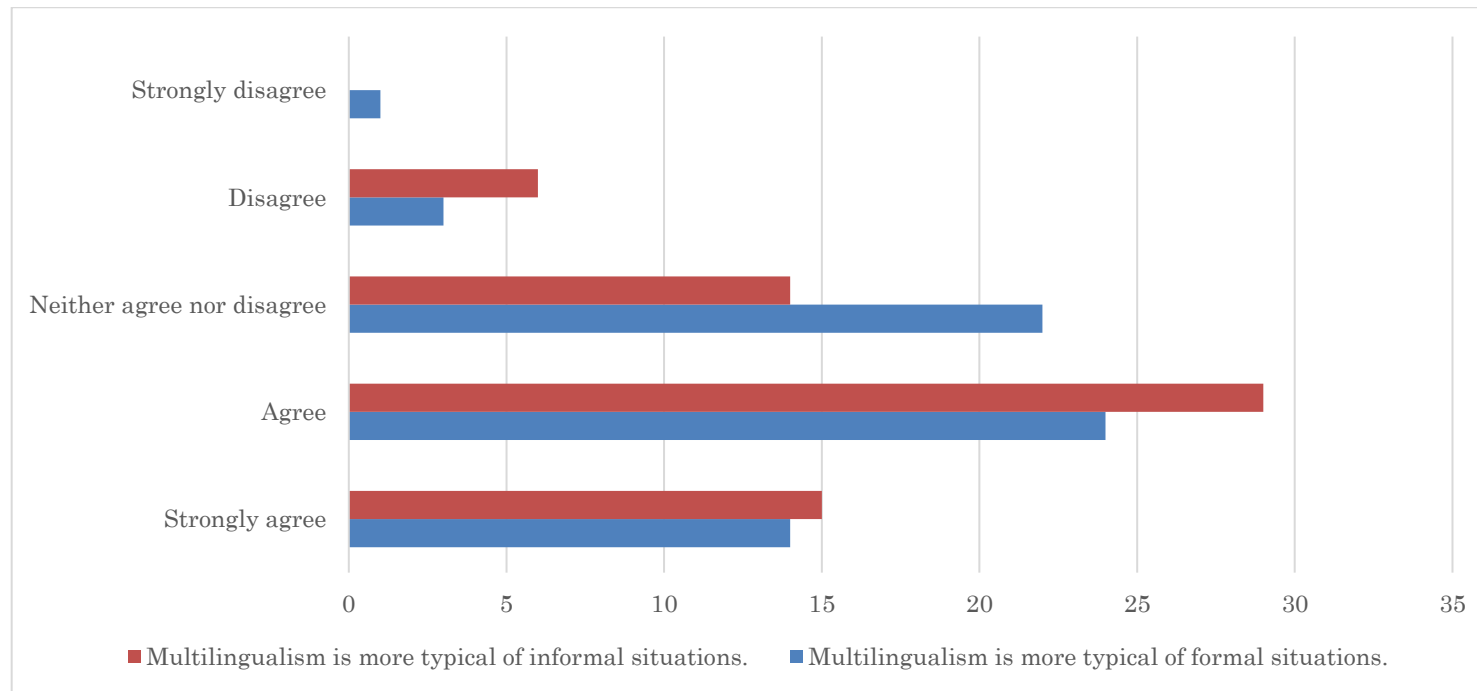

Figure 6: *Impact of the Situation on The Use of Multilingualism.*

Table 3 shows the frequencies in the responses given to the next group of 11 questions (Question No 27 to 37) to concerning students' views on the significance of multilingualism in higher education. What is important in all the answers in this group was that the absolute majority of the respondents chose either "agree" or "strongly agree" as their response options. That is, almost all the respondents agreed that knowing three languages was essential in their professional development (95.3%) and could help in the learning process (96.9%); that multilingual education helped develop language skills (89%), enhance multilingual competence (90.6%), improve intercultural communication skills (89.1%) and prepare for an international career (86%). Somewhat fewer positive answers were given to the questions regarding the role of multilingual education in enhancing motivation (76.5%), promoting better mutual understanding both between students (75%) and between teachers and students (73.8%), and making the learning process more productive (75%). To sum up, multilingualism is believed to have an overall positive effect on the quality of education at the university (84.3%).

Table 3: *Importance of Multilingualism in Educational Processes.*

Questions	5	4	3	2	1
27. Knowledge of Kazakh, Russian and English languages is important for my professional development.	38 (59.4%)	23 (35.9%)	3 (4.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
28. Knowing three languages helps me in the learning process.	34 (53.1%)	28 (43.8%)	2 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
29. Multilingual education contributes to the better development of my language skills.	23 (35.9%)	34 (53.1%)	6 (9.4%)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)
30. Multilingual education improves multilingual competence.	19 (29.7%)	39 (60.9%)	6 (9.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
31. Multilingual education helps improve intercultural communication skills.	22 (34.4%)	35 (54.7%)	6 (9.4%)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)
32. The use of different languages in the educational process helps to increase motivation to study the subject.	18 (28.1%)	31 (48.4%)	11 (17.2%)	4 (6.3%)	0 (0%)
33. Multilingual education helps prepare for an international career.	19 (29.7%)	36 (56.3%)	9 (14.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
34. A multilingual educational environment promotes better mutual understanding between teachers and students.	19 (29.7%)	28 (43.8%)	16 (25%)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)
35. A multilingual educational environment promotes better mutual understanding between students.	18 (28.1%)	30 (46.9%)	12 (18.8%)	4 (6.3%)	0 (0%)
36. A multilingual educational environment has a positive effect on the quality of education at the university.	23 (35.9%)	31 (48.4%)	9 (14.1%)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)
37. Mixing languages makes learning more productive.	19 (29.7%)	29 (45.3%)	11 (17.2%)	5 (7.8%)	0 (0%)

The next contrasting pair of questions consisted of 8 closed-ended questions addressing psychological and methodological aspects of multilingualism in higher education (Questions 38 to 45). These questions aimed at exploring students' attitudes to the role of multilingualism in the learning process, whether it contributed to the comprehension of the material studied in class. Unlike the previous group of general questions regarding the importance of multilingualism in educational processes, the respondents were not so unanimous in their attitudes. On one hand, 76.6% believed that multilingualism contributed to a better understanding of educational material and only 7.8% disagreed with this statement. On the other hand, only 26.6% disagreed that multilingualism hindered the understanding of educational material and 50% agreed. Figure 7 sums up these results.
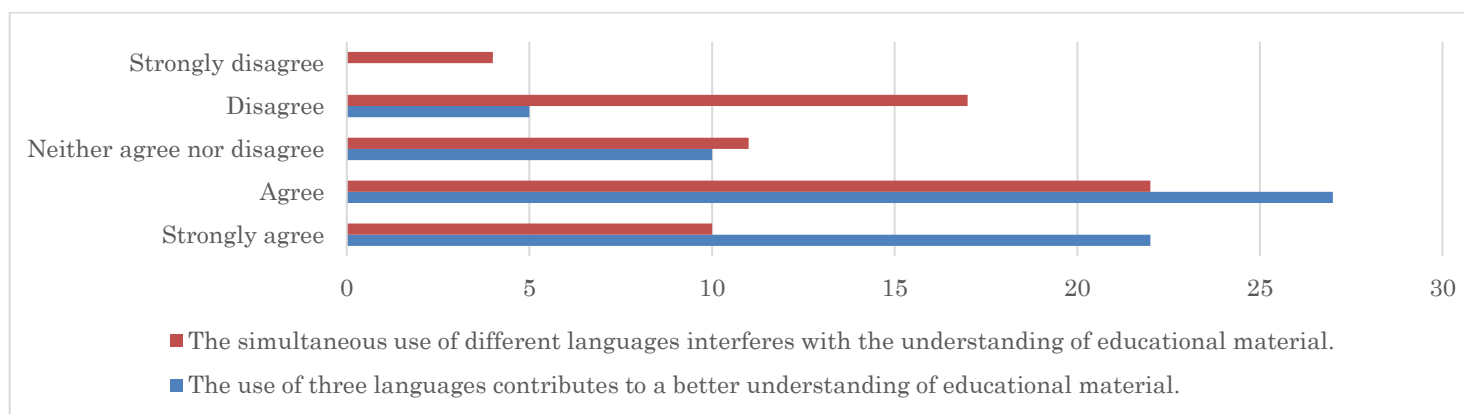

Figure 7: *Impact of Multilingualism on The Comprehension of Material.*

The next three questions examined the impact of multilingualism on the learning process from a psychological perspective (See Figure 8). According to the students' responses, 78.1% felt that their professional competence was increasing under the influence of multilingual education, 71.9% felt comfortable and confident when mixing languages in class, and 64% felt they could easily adapt to different linguistic and cultural contexts. Of interest here is that to each of these questions, about 20% of the respondents were not sure of their answers.
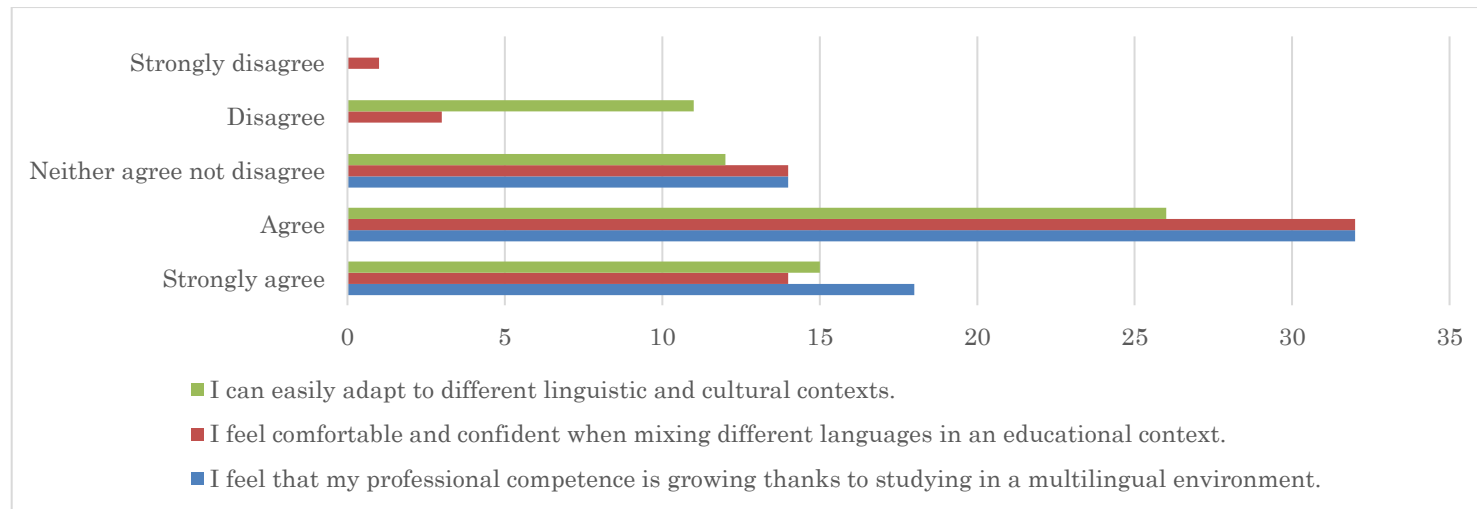
Figure 8: *Psychological Aspects of Multilingualism in Education.*

The final group of questions addressed the availability of resources that contribute to the development of multilingualism at the university where the respondents study. A total of 79.7% respondents stated that their teachers supported the diversity of languages and cultures in their teaching materials and teaching methods; other 79.7% agreed that their university provided sufficient resources for the development of multilingual education and 73.4% agreed that it provided the necessary support in the development of multilingual education. Here again about 20% were not sure of their answers. Figure 9 presents these findings.
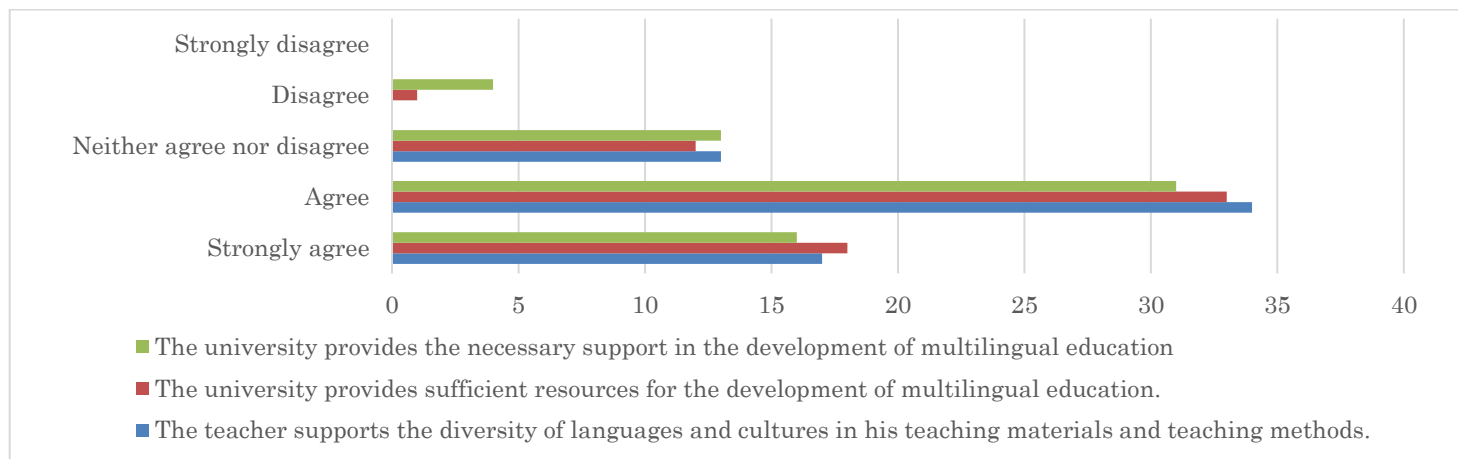

Figure 9: *Methodological and Technical Aspects of Multilingualism in Education.*

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis of participants' responses to open-ended questions allowed organizing them into thematic groups. During the thematic analysis, the themes identified were divided into the following groups: the need for multilingualism in education, the importance of multilingualism for a future profession, the role of multilingualism in the study of a subject, the availability of information in languages, the use of multilingualism in the educational process, challenges in the learning process related to multilingualism, the availability or lack of resources for developing multilingualism at the university, qualifications of teachers, availability of teaching materials, management strategies at the university.

The first group of comments dealt with the use of languages in the learning process. When asked to comment on the actual proportion of the languages used in the classroom, most of the respondents replied "60 percent Kazakh, 20 percent Russian, 20 percent English" or "3:1:1 Kazakh: Russian: English", which in general corresponds to the requirements of the educational multilingual program at the university. However, several respondents noted a more significant advantage towards the Kazakh language by giving the proportion 80/10/10. Some respondents stated that in a classroom the Kazakh language is the most frequently used language: "we most often use Kazakh"; "the Kazakh language dominates in the educational process"; "Since it is a university of Kazakhstan, the Kazakh language prevails, and I believe that it is correct".

Several other respondents provided a more detailed picture of the language distribution in the educational process: "I use Kazakh mostly in speaking, and I add English and Russian during class time and sometimes while speaking Kazakh"; "The Kazakh language dominates, since it is understandable to everyone. In the second place is English. Our specialized subjects are associated with it. The Russian language is used very rarely. It depends on the teacher".

A large number of responses explained the importance of multilingualism in general: "Trilingualism is the call of the times, it helps people expand their knowledge, skills and develop mutual understanding between people, and the degree of language proficiency is one of its main criteria"; "It is more beneficial to learn more than one language while studying"; "Every young professional and student should learn all three languages. Kazakh is our mother tongue, while Russian and English are world languages. That is why we should not limit ourselves to speaking only in Kazakh". Some answers focus on the benefits provided by multilingualism: "Knowing 3 languages will help you achieve better results in many areas"; "A person who knows many languages is of great benefit to society. They will get acquainted not only with the culture of their own country, but also with the cultures of other countries"; "Because the more people learn more languages, the wider their horizons"; "The use of three languages during study leads to fluency in speaking and communication in life".

Some respondents pointed out the need for proper organization of the educational process in order to adopt a multilingual approach effectively in education: "The simultaneous use of several languages in teaching allows for the development of multilingual skills and better mastery of the material. However, this approach requires careful curriculum planning and highly qualified teachers to overcome potential challenges. Done well, I believe multilingual education prepares students to thrive in a global world"; "Using multiple languages at the same time in learning can cause confusion and reduce concentration, but when done correctly it helps develop flexible thinking and language skills".

Particular attention in the students' responses was given to the necessity of multilingualism in their future professional activities: "Because my profession requires full mastery of all three languages"; "I am a future teacher. That is why, it is my duty to learn three languages. An experienced teacher is a guarantee of quality education. I think that it is in the hands of teachers to learn other languages and spread them widely among young people"; "I am a future teacher. In accordance with the requirements of the time, I need to be fluent in three languages"; "This will help me in the future"; "My profession is directly related to three languages. Therefore, knowledge of three languages will be useful to me in the learning process".

When asked about the role of multilingualism in learning a subject, many respondents admitted its contribution to making studies easier, more interesting, understandable: "It will be easier for a student who uses all three languages during the lesson"; "It will be more interesting and understandable"; "Knowing three languages is directly related to my lessons. It helps me to understand the topic"; "During the lesson, reading three languages makes the lessons interesting". Some comments focus on the practical applicability of multilingual classes: "Having 3 languages at the same time, teaches us versatility"; "This helps to use another language in practice and learn it more deeply"; "Firstly, it is very interesting to discuss topics in different languages. This is more practice, more development. Students will be able to share their knowledge with others".

A number of comments emphasized the benefits of knowing different languages that provide access to a wide variety of sources: "Learning three languages helps to fully acquire information"; "Because knowing many languages allows you to understand books other than your own"; "Because knowing more than one language allows me to get the information I need in other languages"; "The more languages you know, the

more you look at the world. The ability to get a lot of information in only one language (in terms of books, works, videos, audiobooks, interviews, articles, mobile applications, etc.) is limited"; "Due to the fact that some subjects are available in three languages, knowing three languages will help you a lot during your studies".

Multilingualism is also regarded by the respondents as a key to information in different languages, especially when information in the Kazakh language is less presented than in the English or Russian languages: "You can find more information in Russian (and in English, too)"; "During the study, it is easier to understand some information in Russian, and more information in English. I believe that information can be accessed quickly and clearly thanks to the use of all three languages"; "I read most of the new and interesting information in my field in Russian or English. Then I have quick access to information"; "Knowledge of three languages enriches the learning experience by increasing access to a variety of sources of information and allowing for better understanding and analysis of materials from different cultural contexts"; "Nowadays, for example, a lot of information is in English, and in my native language it is difficult to find the necessary information, so I can find it in Russian or in English"; "In the absence of data in the Kazakh language, I can look at some topics in Russian or English".

The next group of responses was devoted to their opinions on the opportunities provided by the university to promote the development of multilingualism. First of all, many students noted the high level of qualifications and professionalism of teachers working in the multilingual education programs at the university: "High level of linguistic knowledge of teachers"; "Our university pays great attention to trilingualism. Proof of this is the training of teachers in English"; "Organization of 3-language curriculum, teaching by teachers fluent in other languages"; "The specialists at the university are very qualified and teach in several languages"; "Teachers of language subjects becoming qualified specialists".

According to students' responses, the university provides the necessary materials and conditions to study three languages: "Multilingual teaching materials for students are used in lessons during studies"; "Books and activities in three languages"; "Books and resources in different languages"; "The library has enough books in Russian. I think in the future it is possible to add books in English (well, gradually)"; "Our university provides sufficient resources and materials, courses for the development of multilingual education"; "Our university has a technology park. This park has created conditions for students to study other foreign languages".

In addition to teaching materials, students often mention management strategies aimed at promoting multilingualism at the university: "Our university pays a lot of attention to multilingualism and organizes special language training programs for it"; "Our university offers language learning clubs"; "There are discounts on English courses and there is also a speaking club for English practice"; "Various events are organized and various speaking clubs work"; "Inviting students to learn languages by organizing language competitions, students learning languages in connection with the educational process"; "The university organizes many prize-winning competitions to support young people"; "Many supporting courses are available"; "The university holds various linguistic Olympiads. In addition to Russian and English, here we can teach Chinese and Turkish, German and French"; "We have many language courses at our university, such as Confucius Institute, Turkish language, etc.".

Although the majority of the participants' responses were positive, it is worth noting negative reviews about the difficulty of learning three languages at the same time: "Simultaneous use of different languages interferes with the understanding of educational material"; "Because I think it puts a lot of pressure on the brain"; "It is difficult for me to speak three languages on one subject". Moreover, some comments clearly show that multilingual education has not been fully integrated into the university educational system: "We do not use 3 languages in all subjects. We only use English and Russian languages for required English and physics subjects. I think it would be better if all the subjects were moved to mixed language teaching"; "We have not completely switched to the 3-language education system, but I think that it is useful for us to have 3 languages at the same time". One of the reasons for this is seen in the insufficient number of multilingual groups and teachers who can work professionally in trilingual educational programs: "Few teachers in multilingual programs"; "I think that we need more teachers with certificates and IELTS"; "There are few people with whom you can communicate in three languages and practice"; "There are few groups with whom you can communicate in different languages".

It should be also noted that a somewhat common response to the open-ended questions was "I don't know" or "It's difficult to say". Hence, it is possible to assume that many students of multilingual educational programs still do not have firm opinions or attitudes to multilingualism in the classroom, as multilingual education is a rather new phenomenon in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Discussion

This study discussed several issues concerning multilingualism as an indicator of the effectiveness of the trilingual policy in the higher education of Kazakhstan. From the students' responses it is obvious that multilingual education is one of the most prioritized areas in the education policy of Kazakhstan, which

consists in promoting the acquisition of the Kazakh, Russian and English languages. It is possible to conclude that university students of multilingual educational programs realize a high need to master several languages for their future professional development. This study also reiterates the relevance of multilingualism in the modern environment and emphasizes its importance for a successful career and achieving personal and professional goals. Training in intercultural communication is an important component for students, since the ability to successfully interact with representatives of other cultures opens up new horizons for personal development and the achievement of professional goals.

However, despite all the theoretical importance of the development of multilingualism in education, it is too early to conclude that the multilingual policy in Kazakhstan has been implemented successfully. In fact, what we observe is the development of uneven multilingualism (Ringe, 2022), or linguistic inequality (Nhongo & Siziba, 2022), when the Kazakh language is the dominant language of communication, while the other two languages, especially English, are given less attention. In the country where the traditional languages are Kazakh and Russian (Zharkynbekova & Chernyavskaya, 2022), the English language remains essential mostly as a factor for professional growth (Tuleubayeva et al., 2021). In contrast to other studies where English is viewed as a marker of professionalism (Gritsenko & Aleshinskaya, 2023) and global affiliation (Utegenova et al., 2024), as well as a key to successful integration into the global educational space (Aleshinskaya, 2023), the area of its application in higher education in Kazakhstan is still limited (Djuraeva, 2022). Yet, the respondents note the management attempts to promote English at the university, which might change the situation in future.

Furthermore, the conducted research draws attention to some difficulties that may arise when implementing multilingual educational programs. So far, as some of the responses show, there are not enough specialized resources in the Kazakh language. A dearth of teaching and learning resources in Kazakh is also confirmed in the study into the challenges for the Kazakh language in higher education by Kucherbayeva & Smagulova (2023). There may also be significant difficulties in mastering untranslated or non-equivalent professional vocabulary (Alekseyeva & Pavlova, 2020; Alekseyeva & Pavlova, 2019). A possible solution could be to develop and implement an automated system of multilingual online dictionaries and thesauruses containing terms of various branches of science in three languages (Kazakh, Russian and English). This system should provide open access to a multilingual terminology database and ensure uniformity of terms across all industries (Bayekeyeva et al., 2022).

The contradictory responses to the questionnaire also revealed that Kazakh students in multilingual groups are not fully aware of what multilingualism is and in what particular ways it could provide benefits in the educational process. Although multilingual students favor multilingualism, they still do not have a clear understanding of how the three languages can be mixed when learning a specialized subject. This attitude is similar to the findings in the study by Morais, Hübner, & Welp (2023), according to which it is often believed that despite the acknowledge significance of multilingualism only one language should be used on each occasion. Regarding such an attitude, we suggest considering the concept of translanguaging by the university authorities and promoting it among students.

Translanguaging is a new paradigm for the study of language acquisition (Oliva, Donato, & Ricciardelli, 2020) consisting in multiple discursive practices combining various linguistic structures and systems, in which multilingual speakers engage to make sense of their multilingual worlds (García & Wei, 2014). Translanguaging is described by Wei (2022) as creative, critical and flexible strategies in a multilingual context. According to Cenoz & Gorter (2022), due to the softness and fluency of the boundaries between languages, "students should benefit from being multilingual by using resources from their whole linguistic repertoire" (p. 343). This linguistic fluidity acknowledges students' ability to strategically and creatively exploit and manipulate the linguistic resources, which they have at their disposal, to engage in productive and meaningful interactions (Kawafha & Al Masaeed, 2023).

Conclusion

The main goal of the present study was to explore the attitudes of university students to the use of multilingualism in higher education in Kazakhstan as a criterion of how effectively the new trilingual policy is being implemented in Kazakh university multilingual programs. Drawing research data from a questionnaire among first- and second-year students of multilingual educational programs at a prestigious university in the western region of Kazakhstan, the study analyzed their attitudes to the necessity of multilingualism in education, the specificity of its use in the classroom, the actual proportions of languages used in the classroom, students' language preferences, and the psychological and methodological features of multilingualism in higher education.

The results of the study indicate that Kazakh students realize the significance of multilingualism in the classroom and in their future careers and see support from the university administration; moreover, in the multilingual classroom, they feel comfortable and can easily adapt to alternations between languages. However, their responses allowed us to identify inequal (uneven) implementation of multilingualism, as one language is often

described to dominate over the others in the same situation. Based on the findings of the study, we can conclude that, despite the students' understanding of the necessity of multilingualism in their future professional activities and the university authorities' strategies to promote multilingualism at the university, it is still too early to speak about the success of the state trilingual policy. Although students of multilingual programs generally treat multilingualism as a positive phenomenon, they seem to lack a clear understanding of how the Kazakh, Russian and English languages can be integrated in the study of a specialized subject and what actual possibilities their integration can offer for effective communication in the classroom.

This study has some limitations with regard to a relatively small research sample. A larger sample incorporating respondents from a higher number of universities in different regions of Kazakhstan would provide a more holistic picture of achievements and weaknesses in the realization of the state multilingual program in higher education. However, in spite of these limitations, this study demonstrates the necessity of ensuring equal (even) multilingualism in higher education in Kazakhstan. As possible recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of the trilingual policy it can be suggested to develop an automated system of online trilingual dictionaries and thesauruses of specialized vocabulary in various scientific fields, and expand the scope of viewing multilingualism by the university authorities to include the translanguaging paradigm and promote it among students.

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