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LEARNING ENGLISH IN AND OUT OF SCHOOL IN KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract. This article is an exploratory review of the research examining out of school learning and performance in English as a Foreign Language courses at secondary schools in Kazakhstan. Trilingual policy implementation and limitations of the current English language training at secondary schools are discussed. The opportunities and potential limitations of out-of-school English language training are explored.

Keywords: English proficiency, English language acquisition, out-of-school learning, academic performance in English courses.

Out-of-school English language learning and academic achievement in Kazakhstan

Introduction

English as an international language is spoken in many countries all over the world, both as a native and as a foreign language. Nowadays, nearly a quarter of the world's population speaks English, using it in science, education, politics, world trade, media and commerce. As Kachru and Smith (2008) state, in the time of globalization, all countries need to increase citizens' proficiency in the English language in order to be competitive, so they will be able to function well in international relations, trade and areas of science and education. The English language has a decisive role not only as a means of international communication but also as the foreign language of learning in schools. Educational system of Kazakhstan is making an effort to ensure that all school students achieve literacy in English, taught as a foreign language.

However, the majority of public schools have been posting less than optimal results in developing students' English proficiency (Ahn & Smagulova, 2022). The reasons limiting the progress may be related to the teachers, students or schools (Stefanson, 2012). It is no surprise that students and parents tend to invest in out-of-school English language training courses (Ahn & Smagulova, 2022). Convenience, engaging teaching methods, and higher perceived quality may be the factors influencing parental choices in selecting paid out-of-school English language training options.

There is a longstanding line of applied linguistics literature comparatively investigating the formal and informal foreign language learning environments (Krashen, 1981). For example, Oates and Hawley (1983) even proposed

engaging native speakers of the target language in extracurricular learning, meetings, interviews, thematic weekends and role playing. However little research has been done to study the impact of out-of-school foreign language learning on their English proficiency and academic achievement of high school pupils. This paper aims to provide an exploratory literature review focusing on the link between out-of-school English language learning and English proficiency and achievement in English coursework in school.

2. English learning in and out of school

2.1. English as a Foreign Language in Kazakhstan's educational system

In the 2013-2014 academic year, Kazakhstan implemented a multilingual language policy in secondary schools (Karabasova, 2021). One of the main objectives of this reform was to make sure students develop proficiency in three languages: Kazakh, English, and Russian (Kubeev et al., 2008). A special focus was on English proficiency as the core STEM subjects in schools were planned to be taught in English. In other words, the policy aimed to implement the English-medium instruction of STEM courses. While English-medium instruction has been shown to be successfully implemented in a variety of contexts including Central Asia (Nurshatayeva & Page, 2020; Nurshatayeva, 2020), the results of the implementation of the trilingual language policy in Kazakhstan remain to be evaluated empirically.

Reliable data is key for understanding educational phenomena (Weidman & Nurshatayeva, 2018). One reason it is difficult to study the effectiveness of English language related reforms is lack of rigorous data on students' English language proficiency. We also lack data on the teaching practices, something that could help a lot in understanding how English is actually taught in schools despite or thanks to the announced reforms (Millan, 2021).

The scant literature offers some glimpses into what happens in schools regarding English language learning. For example, a survey by Yeskeldiyeva and Tazhibayeva (2015) suggests that while most students are satisfied with their English learning and proficiency, approximately 8,2 % students were not satisfied by how advanced their English language proficiency was and reported that the English languages training system offered in schools was not beneficial for students. Students also reported several reasons causing poor academic performance in English language learning such as lack of infrastructure (27,0%), weak motivation of students (37,5%), weak teacher preparation (10,5%), old methods of teaching (18,5%), lack of reliable materials (47,5%) (Yeskeldiyeva & Tazhibayeva, 2015). In sum, this survey suggests that there is likely much room for improvement in how English is learned at schools in Kazakhstan.

2.2. Is out-of-school English learning a solution?

According to Hymes (1971), out-of-school learning of foreign languages is necessary as it allows students develop communicative competence, which includes grammatical, strategic and sociolinguistic competences. Indeed, out-of-school English language training overcomes many limitations of the formal in-school language training by offering students advance their communicative competence allowing individually tailored opportunities for language

acquisition (Nordquist,2018). Given the importance of students' motivation in learning English (Nurshatayeva, 2011), out-of-school learning may be more motivating for students by providing the unrestricted learning environment without formal evaluation as well as by fostering a welcoming space for sharing and creating. Indeed, studies showed that students with different educational backgrounds showed higher involvement in out-of-school activities (Slastenin, 1997). Out-of-school English language learning can be organized at a time and in a location convenient for students. Furthermore, according to Tyabina (2011), out-of-school English learning centers tend to choose engaging and various topics and teaching materials.

But can out-of-school English learning address all limitations of the formal English language training in schools? Based on some studies of out-of-school learning and general academic achievement, the answer is no. According to Shulruf (2010), extracurricular activities do not directly affect academic achievement measured by standardized tests and GPAs (Reeves, 2008). According to the studies of Melnick, Sabo, and Vanfossen (1992), high school athletic involvement and being evolved in youth groups, was not essentially related to test scores and grades of students.

However, some studies have defined the positive influence of out-of-school and extracurricular activities on students' grade point averages. Involvement in sports and youth groups was found to be associated with the development of students' motivation, regular participation in the classroom, better academic performance, better developed social skills and self-confidence of the students (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; McCarthy, 2000; Silliker & Quirk, 1997).

In sum, there is limited and mixed evidence on how out-of-school learning may influence learning and achievement. With English, this evidence base is still in need of development.

3. Conclusion

This exploratory review suggests that teaching English as a foreign language in Kazakhstani secondary schools could be substantially improved. This review of the relevant literature has also shown that out-of-school learning could be an important avenue allowing students to learn English well and thereby improve their performance in English at school.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАНДА МЕКТЕПТЕН ЖӘНЕ МЕКТЕПТЕН ТЫС АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІН ҮЙРЕНУ

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақала мектептен тыс оқытуды және Қазақстанның орта мектептеріндегі ағылшын тілі курстарындағы шет тілі ретіндегі үлгерімге арналған зерттеудің алдын ала шолуы болып табылады. Үш тілділік саясатын іске асыру және орта мектептерде ағылшын тілін ағымдағы оқытуды шектеу талқыланады. Мектептен тыс ағылшын тілін оқытудың мүмкіндіктері мен шектеулері зерттеледі..

Түйін сөздер: ағылшын тілін білу, ағылшын тілін игеру, мектептен тыс оқыту, ағылшын тілі курстарындағы академиялық үлгерім.

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ИЗУЧЕНИЕ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА В И ВНЕ ШКОЛЫ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ

Аннотация. Эта статья представляет собой предварительный обзор исследования, посвященного изучению внешкольного обучения и успеваемости на курсах английского языка как иностранного в средних школах Казахстана. Обсуждается реализация политики трехъязычия и ограничения текущего обучения английскому языку в средних школах. Исследуются возможности и потенциальные ограничения внешкольного обучения английскому языку.

Ключевые слова: владение английским языком, овладение английским языком, внешкольное обучение, академическая успеваемость на курсах английского языка.

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