

Language Use among Secondary School Students in Kazakhstan

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This study analyzes the results of a survey conducted among 76 urban high school students of both genders at a school in Astana, Kazakhstan, to compare patterns of language use among children from classes with Russian and Kazakh language of instruction. The study revealed that Russian continues to dominate most of the spheres of language use and is utilized as the main language of communication by over 50% of students enrolled in Russian classes, as well as the alternate language of communication with peers by around 70% of the Kazakh-speaking youth attending Kazakh classes. The study also revealed that immediate family, including parents and grandparents in particular, play an important role in preserving the use of Kazakh as the main language of communication. Seventy seven percent of students in Kazakh classes use exclusively Kazakh in communication with grandparents. Meanwhile, in bilingual and Russian-speaking families parents no longer push the use of Kazakh by children with only 19% of children using exclusively Kazakh with grandparents. Importantly, the study revealed that children in both groups increasingly rely on the use of Russian and English in communication across various modern media, such as TV and the Internet. The study concludes that the continuing dominance of Russian may create challenges for maintenance of Kazakh during introduction of trilingual education policy and recommends that greater attention should be paid by policy makers to development of Internet content in Kazakh, while ethnic Kazakh parents should maintain a stricter mono-lingua policy at home to preserve Kazakh.

Keywords: Language policy, Multilingualism, Trilingualism, Language use