

### Multiculturalism: the new target of education policy in Kazakhstan

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**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the problem of the realization of new educational paradigms in Kazakhstan's system of secondary and higher education, in particular multicultural education. The authors made the attempt to give an insight how multicultural education is understood by Kazakhstani scholars, what reasons and conditions caused the rise of multicultural ideas in education system and how they are being pursued through the ethnocultural, ethnopedagogical, multilingual and multicultural training of the young generation. While analyzing multicultural education in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the authors presented the first achieved results through the realization of the State Programmes and Concepts aimed at the formation of multicultural individual and multicultural society. The article states what new goals are set up by the country's government and what objectives require further solution so that Kazakhstan's education system could meet the modern multicultural education requirements accepted in the world educational sphere.

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#### Introduction

The world is rapidly changing and the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century call for culturally sensitive and internationally focused relationships. Our present societies are experiencing diversity in all spheres of our lives (demographics, languages, religions, cultures, etc) in a much wider extent than they have ever had before. Multiculturalism has appeared as a new paradigm of viewing the life in the modern time but since this concept is very ambiguous and versatile, and all discussions about multiculturalism has not yet given its clear and single definition, it is often being misunderstood, misused and interpreted by different population classes in the way they view the world from their social position, biases and self-interests.

Overall, multiculturalism signals a heightened awareness of and concern with the increasingly problematic relationship between race, ethnicity, and national identity. This also accounts for why 'multiculturalism' has remained a controversial concept despite its now common circulation. While the precise meaning of the word is never clear, multiculturalism refers generally to the dilemmas and difficulties of the politics of difference.

Kazakhstan's education system operates with two English terms 'multiculturalism' and 'polyculturalism' which both are interpreted as equal, harmonious, mutually tolerant existence of diverse languages, and of different religious, cultural and ethnic groups in a pluralist society. In our work we

tend to use the term 'multiculturalism' in order to refer to the notion determined in the sentence above.

The significance of multiculturalism and the realization of multicultural education in Kazakhstan is arisen from the fact that the country's system of education will not be seen as adequate and fully-functional one if it fails to provide its citizens with the education aimed at the formation and the enhancement of those future specialists' skills and competences which enable them to realize their personal potential while preserving cultural, national and civil identity in conditions of the integration to the world society. In this respect the Concept of Ethnocultural Education worked out by Zh.Zh. Nauryzbai considerably widens the range of associations concerning the teaching of an individual. This pedagogical approach is concerned with the orientation of an individual living in a multicultural society to other cultures through his or her own culture. The most important aspect in the theory of ethnocultural education is the strategy which is directed to the realization of two interconnected aims: ethnical identification and state integration [1, p. 5]. The problem of multicultural education also finds its consideration in the Concept of Ethnopedagogical Education suggested by the professor K. Zh. Kozhahmetova. The goal of ethnopedagogical education is the formation of students' self-consciousness, non-alienated attitude to the history, language, culture and culture of their peoples that will consequently promote the formation of individual's national self-consciousness and culture

of international relationships. Ethnopedagogical education facilitates a harmonious combination of national and human values so that it allows an individual to get to know specific national features of his or her own nation through its culture, language, history and make an unbiased comparative analysis of other peoples' national peculiarities [2, p. 7]. Thus, ethnocultural and ethnopedagogical education can predictably result in the formation of an individual who is able of positive self-realization in the multicultural society. The working out of ethnocultural and ethnopedagogical education presupposed the necessity of the enhancement of cross-cultural and communicative competences which are impossible to deal with if there is no relevant language education in the country. Kazakhstan's language education is completely determined with the country's language situation: if few decades ago due to the political ideology of the Soviet Union's government the language situation in Kazakhstan could be described as either monolingualism (Russian language) or bilingualism (knowledge of a mother tongue and the Russian Language), nowadays it can be notable for not monolingualism or sometimes bilingualism but habitual bilingualism and even multilingualism (Kazakh, Russian, foreign languages (in most cases the knowledge of English language) and a mother tongue) which reveals new sides of language education in the country. Hence, based on the President's cultural programme 'The Unity of three languages' (Kazakh as the official language, Russian - the language of interethnic relationships within the republic and post-Soviet territory, English - the language of international communication), the Concept of Multilingual Education Development elaborated by B.A. Zhetpisbayeva aimed at the working out of the strategy of the multilingualism realization in the framework of new education paradigm in the republic [3, p. 93].

Thus, the education system in Kazakhstan is greatly concerned with the questions of the formation of the multicultural and multilingual nation since the country's government clearly understands that only the education of such kind leads to a positive attitude, not only to the host and minority cultures, but to the equal validity of all cultures. Therefore, not surprising that multiculturalism ideas have been involved into the Kazakhstan's educational sphere resulting in many new teaching and learning trends and in our work we will try to have an insight into how multicultural education is seen and realized in conditions of Kazakhstan's education system.

## Main part

The Republic of Kazakhstan is an independent state and was formed in 1991 as the result of the dissolution of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics. One of the problems that Kazakhstan inherited from the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics was the problem of the nation building in the multiethnic state and the related problem of language planning in the conditions of multilingualism.

The historic land of the Kazakhs has accumulated rich experience of peaceful coexistence of peoples, civilizations, cultures and different religions in one state that accounts for the country's unity and provides conflict-free ethnic relations at the present stage. Being the home to people of more than 130 different nationalities and ethnicities, present Kazakhstan is a multinational state with the established and constantly evolving multi-ethnic mentality.

Political processes in Kazakhstan, its dynamic economic development, its desire to enter the world educational sphere require the country to be open to different points of view, be able to rethink and evaluate the contributions which are made and being made by diverse cultural-historical paradigms to the educational process. Having chosen the course to enter the single world educational sphere and achieve the social mobility of its citizens, Kazakhstan is bound to develop a dialogue or, if to be more precise, a polylogue of cultures and traditions, customs and mentalities, religions and educational systems.

For many Kazakhstan's people bilingualism has been the norm for a long time and at present days we can identify many types of bilingualism (Kazakh-Russian, Russian-Kazakh, Kazak-Tatar, Russian-German bilingualism, etc.) differed by their distribution regions, the scope of functioning spheres of languages and language specific interferences with each other. Nowadays the educational system of Kazakhstan provides the learning of Kazakh as the state language, Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication within the country, a foreign language and a mother tongue of this or that ethnic group and, therefore, the present realities speak of multilingualism rather than bilingualism which plays an important role in the formation of multiculturalism [4, p. 23].

There is no doubt that the integration of Kazakhstan into the global community, the building of an open democratic society, the internationalization of all life spheres contribute to the fact that multiculturalism is being dictated by the present time and, therefore, one of the most urgent objectives of Kazakhstan's modern education is the formation of the Kazakhstani identity with a

planetary thinking. In this respect, the problem of multicultural education in Kazakhstan is now even more actualized.

In fact, like in many countries of the world, in Kazakhstan multicultural education means different things to different people, however, the differences are not as great, confusing, or contradictory. Such differences are naturally found in discussions of multicultural education simply because educators who look at schooling from the point of sociology, psychology, or economics will have differing views of the key concerns of education. Nevertheless, this diversity is not a problem for the Kazakhstani society as all specialists consider that multicultural education is all about plurality [5, p.58].

In other words, in Kazakhstan multicultural education means learning about, preparing for, and celebrating cultural diversity, or learning to be multicultural. In this respect, education must facilitate the realization of two aspects: on the one hand, an individual is to be aware of his origin so that to determine his personal position in the world, on the other hand, an individual is to be taught respectful and tolerant relationship to people of different nations, ethnic groups and confessions. This very educational paradigm is regarded as multicultural education in Kazakhstan. Thus, we think that contemporary education tendencies of multiculturalism ideas in Kazakhstan are fully presented by professor K. Zh. Kozhahmetova's definition of multicultural education, '... is the significant part of modern education aimed at interethnic integration and promoting the understanding of common and unique in traditions, education, cultural values of nations living in the territory of one country and the upbringing of young people in the spirit of respect to foreign culture's life and worldview values' [6, p. ].

The actions taken in schools to adopt multicultural education should reflect the race, language, ethnicity, habits, and customs of ethnic groups throughout the global community. In order to promote a comprehensive understanding of cultural groups, we must use a variety of methods and a combination of various areas of study fields, including the humanities, arts, social sciences, history, politics, and sciences. To implement multicultural education fully, fundamental changes will need to be made in the conception, organization, and execution of the educational process.

Thus, on the basis of implied meanings in the definitions given above we can form an opinion of general agreement among multiculturalists that multiculturalism requires simultaneous changes on multiple levels of schooling. These changes must be

deliberate, long-range, ongoing, and most important, comprehensive.

In the Republic of Kazakhstan this multilingual- and multicultural-oriented education policy position is reflected explicitly in the basic documents for the modernization of education, and thus gets an immediate access to new models and mechanisms for the management of educational systems and institutions. Today there is no need to prove that there must be a balanced policy in the sphere of education taking into accounts both national interests and national-cultural characteristics of the nations living in our state. This allows us to clearly formulate and solve real problems of the education modernization, the upbringing of the younger generation in the spirit of patriotism, tolerance, religious tolerance and willingness to cross-cultural interaction in the context of complex social processes.

The state is trying to create all necessary conditions for the modernization of education based on the principles of multiculturalism: the scientific and methodological support, the publication of textbooks, teaching aids and courseware, the creation of a unified network of information support for multicultural education, the training of teachers in order to teach them to develop cross-cultural communication and implement ideas and technologies of multicultural education when working with ethnically various groups of students.

In the 1990s new concepts of education were worked out, including the concept of ethno-cultural education which gives a detailed definition of 'a multicultural individual'. According to this concept, 'a multicultural individual is an individual with developed linguistic awareness. The knowledge of the native and official languages and the learning of a foreign language broaden an individual's mind, promote his or her multi-sided development, promote the formation of his or her tolerant and broad view of the world' [7, p. ]. This definition gave us in the best way the idea of what the next generation should be like.

In November 1996, an important document formulating the new strategy in language policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan was adopted in continuation of the general principles stated in the Constitution. This document is the Concept of the Language Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan, which was extremely important for planning a guarantee of success in any large-scale change because it provided a general theoretical framework and guidelines for language policy-making, i.e. an overview of preconditions, the most general goals and objectives based on the interpretation of a model of the target linguistic situation, the primary

directions of political legislation and practices, and a convincing plan to counteract the public's resistance to change. In this Concept, the authors recognized that "the main pre-requisite for the optimal development of social processes in the contemporary world is stability of interethnic communication" and that "language policy should facilitate the preservation of stability in interethnic communication" [8, p. ].

The principles of the state language policy are defined in the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Education and Languages, State Programmes of Education development, and State Programmes of the Development and Functioning of Languages which are systematically worked out for a certain time period with specifically stated goals and objectives.

The State Programme of the Development and Functioning of Languages for 2011-2020 contains the development strategy of the state language, Kazakhstan nations' languages and foreign language learning which identifies the following four main goals:

1. The extension and strengthening of social and communicative functions of the state language;
2. The preservation of common cultural features of the Russian language as the language of interethnic communication within the territory of Kazakhstan;
3. The development of ethnic groups' languages;
4. The learning of the English language as the language of international education and integration [9, p. ].

In Kazakhstan the multicultural upbringing of an individual is carried out by both schools, and family, and through the media, therefore, it has the nature of continuing education. To achieve the goals stated in the State Programme of the Development and Functioning of Languages for 2011-2020, in the country there are schools with teaching in languages of various ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan, a network of Sunday schools teaching a native language of different ethnic groups, newspapers issued in languages of various diasporas, TV channels and television programmes broadcasted in their mother tongue. The expected results of this language policy are the creation of an optimal sociolinguistic sphere defined by the achievement of the desired functional relation of languages used in the Republic of Kazakhstan. In its turn this sociolinguistic sphere is to lead to the creation of the country's society characterized as a rich variety of original and unique cultures which understand that multiculturalism is not a threat to national culture but

tolerance, that is, respect to cultural traditions of other nations.

Under the programme of multicultural education development Kazakhstan is currently carrying out the experiment on the development of Kazakh - Russian – English language education. Schools have began implementing the training in three languages (Russian, Kazakh and English) what itself is a significant step towards the realization of the Concept of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2015 that defines basic competencies as 'trilingualism', multiculturalism and communication [10, p. 35]. During the experiment process the conditions for the formation and development of a multicultural individual speaking three languages are being created: students are taught not only to speak different languages, but also the cultural heritage of the nations of studied languages and rethink their own identity based on shared human values [11, p. 155].

Thus, carried out economic, educational, social and political reforms provided the society with the conditions necessary for the revival and the development of cultures and languages of all Kazakhstan's peoples. It should be noted that this development is based on the civil unity of all country's ethnic groups, which facilitates the harmonization of interethnic relations [12, p. 111].

Thus, the conditions created in Kazakhstan are ideal for the development of multicultural education and the upbringing of a multicultural individual, whose purpose is to increase one's own culture in general: the culture of communication, speech culture, and some others. The multicultural aspect of modern civilization may become a powerful humanistic concept of intercultural dialogue both within a country and in the world. Tolerance in a multiethnic civilization is the spirit of the times, and the positive example of Kazakhstan's cultural and educational environment can be of great importance for the educational world.

## Conclusion

To sum up, it should be said that Kazakhstan makes efforts and creates all necessary conditions for the modernization of education on the basic principles of multiculturalism, including: the working out of teaching methods, scientific and educational literature, the publication of teaching aids, the creation of common information support net on the questions of multicultural education, the teacher training for the purpose of the realization of multicultural education' ideas and technologies [13, p. 55].

As it has been mentioned above, nowadays in education system of Kazakhstan one can find



Concepts which have already been existing and those which are still realizing while being directed to the development of versatile and competitive individuals. These Concepts originated as the result of legal and regulatory framework in the sphere of education policy with the view of the realization of multilingual, multicultural, ethnocultural and ethnopedagogical training [14, p. 34].

At the moment, the state policy in education is aimed at developing and achieving a high level of higher education quality that meets both the needs of labor market, population and relevant international best practices in education. The platform of this objective realization is the State Programme for the Development of Education of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020. According to this State Programme in order to create innovative, model of education, the number of schools offering education in three languages, will increase to 700. These schools will become the basis for the development of multilingual and multicultural model of education in the country covering school and higher education stages [15, p. 156].

Though the basis of multicultural education in Kazakhstan has already been set up, there are several objectives which require solving for the further realization of multiculturalism:

- the realization of laws and regulations dealing with the multicultural education development (State Programmes);

- the necessity of training teachers - specialists of various school subjects or university disciplines as well as Kazakh, Russian and foreign language teachers – with the knowledge of the principles of multicultural education who will be working in organizations of secondary and higher education;

- the extension of the scientific and methodological support of educational organizations and teaching staff;

- further working out and publication of educational materials, textbooks, teaching aids and courseware for schools and higher educational institutions in accordance with the principles of multicultural education [16, p. 56].

Multicultural education may require a re-evaluation of the whole curriculum with an analysis of how subjects (even seemingly neutral ones such as science and mathematics) may represent cultures [17, p. 85]. Alternative perspectives should not be included as an appendix to a mainstream view, isolating different perspectives from each other, and presenting a sanitized version of history. Instead,

there is a need to present integrated multiple perspectives, with the distinctive contributions of different cultural groups, and the interdependence of different experiences [18, p. 65]. We can see that the impulse behind multicultural education is a very positive one and it is not surprising that many countries comprehend the necessity of forming a multicultural society. In this respect Kazakhstan's experience can be taken as one of the positive example of forming such society.

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