

The Influence of English Learning on Ethnic Kazakh Minority Students' Identity (Re)Construction at Chinese Universities

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Abstract : English language is perceived as cultural capital in many non-native English-speaking countries, and minority groups in these social contexts seem to invest in the language to be empowered and reposition themselves from the imbalanced power relation with the dominant group. This study is devoted to explore how English learning influence minority Kazakh students' identity (re)construction at Chinese universities from the scope of 'imagined community, investment, and identity' theory of Norton (2013). To this end the three research questions were designed as follows: 1) Kazakh minority students' English learning experiences at Chinese universities; 2) Kazakh minority students' views about benefits and opportunities of English learning; 3) the influence of English learning on Kazakh minority students' identity (re)construction. The study employs an interview-based qualitative research method by interviewing nine Kazakh minority students in universities in Xinjiang and other inland cities in China. The findings suggest that through English learning, some students have reconstructed multiple identities as multicultural and global identities, which created 'a third space' to break limits of their ethnic and national identities and confused identity as someone in-between. Meanwhile, most minority students were empowered by the English language to resist inferior or marginalized positions and reconstruct imagined elite identity. However, English learning disempowered students who have little previous English education in school and placed them on unequal footing with other students, which further escalated the educational inequities.

Keywords : minority in China, identity construction, multilingual education, language empowerment

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