

The Role of Professional Teacher Development in Introducing Trilingual Education into the Secondary School Curriculum: Lessons from Kazakhstan, Central Asia

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Abstract : Kazakhstan, a post-Soviet economy located in the Central Asia, is making great efforts to internationalize its national system of education. The country is very ambitious in making the national economy internationally competitive and education has become one of the main pillars of the nation's strategic development plan for 2030. This paper discusses the role of professional teacher development in upgrading the secondary education curriculum with the introduction of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in grades 10-11 grades. Having Kazakh as the state language and Russian as the official language, English bears a status of foreign language in the country. The development of trilingual education is very high on the agenda of the Ministry of Education and Science. It is planned that by 2019 STEM-related subjects - Biology, Chemistry, Computing and Physics - will be taught in EMI. Introducing English-medium education appears to be a very drastic reform and the teaching cadre is the key driver here. At the same time, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the teaching profession is still struggling to become attractive in the eyes of the local youth. Moreover, the quality of Kazakhstan's secondary education is put in question by OECD national review reports. The paper presents a case study of the nation-wide professional development programme arranged for 5 010 school teachers so that they could be able to teach their content subjects in English starting from 2019 onwards. The study is based on the mixed methods research involving the data derived from the surveys and semi-structured interviews held with the programme participants, i.e. school teachers. The findings of the study imply the significance of the school teachers' attitudes towards the top-down reform of trilingual education. The qualitative research data reveal the teachers' beliefs about advantages and disadvantages of having their content subjects (e.g. Biology or Chemistry) taught in EMI. The study highlights teachers' concerns about their professional readiness to implement the top-down reform of English-medium education and discusses possible risks of academic underperforming on the part of students whose English language proficiency is not advanced. This paper argues that for the effective implementation of the English-medium education in secondary schools, the state should adopt a comprehensive approach to upgrading the national academic system where teachers' attitudes and beliefs play the key role in making the trilingual education policy effective. The study presents lessons for other national academic systems considering to transfer its secondary education to English as a medium of instruction.

Keywords : teacher education, teachers' beliefs, trilingual education, case study

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