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Research Article

**CAN THE KAZAKH LANGUAGE BECOME A FUNDAMENTAL
FACTOR IN THE NATION-BUILDING OF KAZAKHSTAN?**

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ABSTRACT

Nation-building is not a one-day process and must be planned for the medium and long term. In nation-building, there are several aspects on which it is based, and the language used is one of the main ones. Countries were created on the principles of language, culture, and territorial affiliation. Therefore, the further formation of the nation for Kazakhstan is a very pressing issue today. This article examines the issue of nation-building in Kazakhstan using such a key tool as language. Thus, the article examines the research question: is the Kazakh language capable of becoming a full-fledged basis for building a nation in Kazakhstan today? The study used the results of a sociological and expert survey, which were conducted as part of the order of the Language Policy Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2023. The survey showed the level of proficiency and use of the Kazakh language among the Kazakh population, broken down by regions and ethnic groups. An expert survey identified the reasons for the weak distribution and use of the Kazakh language, and expert recommendations were provided. All these data were summarized and analysed in this article.

Keywords: Memory, Historical memory, Cultural memory, Nation-building, National identity.

INTRODUCTION

Language is widely recognized as a critical tool in the process of nation-building, serving both as a means of communication and as an essential element in constructing social identity (Pathan et al., 2018). The role of language in nation-building is pivotal, as it contributes not only to facilitating everyday interactions but also to fostering a sense of collective belonging and unity among citizens (Pardesi et al., 2020). Language is fundamentally intertwined with the idea of nation-building, a concept that scholars have explored in depth. The connection between language and nation-building is emphasized by various studies, which highlight how language serves to bind individuals into a collective national identity, a point reinforced by numerous scholars (Heng, 2017; John, 2015; Ngwenya, 2011; Tajuddin et al., 2019). Alesina and Reich (2015) further define nation-building as a complex process aimed at forming a cohesive state where citizens share common goals, preferences, and values. These shared interests foster a sense of unity, preventing separation and division within the country. At the heart of this process is the concept of national identity, which is often closely linked to the use of a common language (Wright, 2004). In this sense, language functions not merely as a means of communication, but also as a powerful tool for shaping and solidifying the concept of the nation-state (Pardesi et al., 2020).

Moreover, language also serves another critical function: the projection and articulation of diverse cultural identities. It allows individuals to identify themselves within their respective communities and differentiate themselves from others (Tajuddin et al., 2019). This dual role of language, as both a tool of communication and a marker of identity, makes it a central component in the formation of a unified national culture. Scholars have consistently pointed to the importance of developing a shared language and culture in the context of nation-building. For instance, Noel (2017) emphasizes that the construction of a “one language, one culture” framework is crucial for the success of nation-building efforts. Because language is so central to cultural identity, it plays an essential role in highlighting the distinctions between different cultural groups (Ogwudile, 2014). Consequently, language becomes a critical instrument for both cultural integration and assimilation, as it helps merge different cultural identities into a single national framework (Tajuddin et al., 2019). Additionally, language plays a key role in promoting cultural unification, aiding in the emergence of a national language ideology. This ideology, which seeks to create a unifying language for the entire population, is often referred to as standard language ideology (Gijsbert, 2019). Scholars argue that the rise of nations and nationalism is directly tied to larger political, social, and cultural transformations (Hobsbawm, 1990; Bayar, 2011). These nation-building processes, including language policies, are typically carried out through top-down approaches, with governments playing an active role in promoting the language of the dominant ethnic group in all areas of public life (Kulbayeva, 2018). Governments often implement policies aimed at integrating

the indigenous language into various spheres, from education to administration, in order to strengthen national unity (Ibrahim, 2020).

The importance of language in nation-building is also reflected in the way different theoretical schools of nationalism approach the subject. According to Wright (2000), the four main schools of thought on nationalism – primordialists, perennialists, modernists, and postmodernists – each assign a different level of importance to language in the process of nation-building. Primordialists and perennialists tend to view language as an inherent and enduring aspect of national identity, while modernists and postmodernists see it as a constructed element that can be manipulated for political purposes. Regardless of the theoretical perspective, however, there is a consensus among scholars that language remains a central tool in nation-building (Safran, 1999). Language planning, therefore, becomes not only a cultural and educational issue but also a political one. As Caviedes (2003) notes, language planning often has significant political implications, as it determines which groups have access to power and resources and which are excluded. Since language serves as a primary tool for participation, it can either facilitate inclusion or contribute to exclusion, thereby altering the balance of power among different groups within the state (Caviedes, 2003). The success of a nation's aspirations to become a cohesive state, therefore, often hinges on the language that its citizens can speak, read, and write (Gellner, 1994). A historical example of this can be seen in 19th-century Europe, where the push for political independence was frequently accompanied by the promotion of a common national language (Safran, 2005). Similarly, in the United States, English played a central role in the creation of the “melting pot” phenomenon, wherein people from diverse ethnic backgrounds came together under a shared national ideology, often referred to as the “American Dream” (Dupré, 2012).

However, the role of language in nation-building is not always straightforward, as can be seen in the cases of Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Ukraine gained its independence in 1991, yet a significant portion of the population, particularly in the eastern regions, does not speak or fully understand Ukrainian, the official state language (Kamusella, 2001). A similar situation can be observed in Kazakhstan. According to Article 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kazakh language is the official state language, but Russian continues to play a dominant role in many spheres of public life, particularly as the language of interethnic communication (Altynbekova, 2015). This linguistic reality is largely a legacy of the Soviet period when Russian overshadowed local languages in the political, educational, and cultural domains. As a result, many post-Soviet successor states, including Kazakhstan, have made efforts to reduce the symbolic and instrumental dominance of the Russian language as part of their nation-building projects (Agadjaniana, 2022). These efforts are emblematic of a broader trend in post-colonial and post-imperial states, where language is often used as a tool for restructuring national identity and asserting independence.

In light of these observations, it becomes clear that nation-building is an essential task for leaders in multi-ethnic and pluralistic societies, and language plays a central role in this process. Okeke et al. (2021) argue that language serves as the foundation of national unity, providing the means through which diverse populations can come together to form a single, cohesive nation. The connection between language and nation-building is not a modern phenomenon but can be traced back to the emergence of numerous new nation-states throughout history (Adelola, 2023). Given the importance of language in fostering national unity, this paper seeks to explore the specific case of Kazakhstan, asking the critical research question: Is the Kazakh language capable of serving as the foundation for nation-building in contemporary Kazakhstan? To answer this question, the paper examines sociological data on the distribution and usage of the Kazakh language, with the goal of determining whether its current status is sufficient to support the formation of a unified national identity.

While the role of language in nation-building is widely acknowledged across different historical and political contexts, the case of Kazakhstan presents unique challenges and opportunities. As the country continues to navigate its post-Soviet identity, the question of whether the Kazakh language can serve as the unifying force necessary for nation-building remains crucial. Through an examination of sociological research, this paper aims to shed light on the potential of the Kazakh language to fulfill this role, contributing to a broader understanding of the relationship between language and nation-building in multi-ethnic states.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

This article is based on the results of a survey commissioned by the Committee on Language Policy under the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2023. The objective of this research was to evaluate the current state of language use and policies in Kazakhstan, focusing on various aspects of societal and professional life. The findings from this study are made publicly accessible and have been published on the official website of the Committee on Language Policy. This article draws on data obtained from previous sociological and analytical studies, providing insights into the state of language usage across different demographic, professional, and ethnic groups in the country.

The study was carried out across all regions of Kazakhstan and included a comprehensive range of population groups. It involved individuals aged 18 and above, employees working in sectors related to economics and finance, and participants from two focus groups, as well as a series of expert interviews. This wide-ranging approach ensured a diverse sample that represents the complexity of Kazakhstani society. A total of 4,000 respondents participated in the survey, all aged 18 years or older, and were selected using a stratified sampling method. The

selection process took into consideration factors such as gender, age, educational background, and geographic location, allowing the researchers to capture a representative cross-section of Kazakhstan's population.

The survey was conducted in every region of Kazakhstan, ensuring national coverage. Respondents were categorized into urban and rural populations, with 2429 participants from urban areas and 1571 from rural regions. The sample's gender distribution was fairly balanced, with 48.2% male respondents (a total of 1929 individuals) and 51.8% female respondents (2071 individuals). This gender balance is reflective of the national demographic structure, ensuring that both perspectives are well represented in the data.

The age distribution of respondents was designed to reflect the various life stages and generational cohorts within the population. The breakdown is as follows: 27.5% of respondents were aged between 18 and 29, representing younger adults, including students and early-career professionals. The largest age group, accounting for 33.7% of the sample, consisted of individuals aged 30 to 45, which typically includes mid-career professionals and working adults. Meanwhile, 30.6% of respondents were aged between 46 and 60, a group likely to consist of established professionals and near-retirees. Finally, 8.2% of respondents were aged 61 years and older, capturing the perspectives of retirees and the elderly.

Ethnic diversity is a notable feature of the Kazakhstani population, and the survey sample reflected this diversity. Kazakhs, who make up the majority population in Kazakhstan, accounted for 68.3% of respondents. Russians, the second-largest ethnic group in the country, represented 18.1% of participants. Smaller ethnic groups were also included in the study, with 2.9% of respondents identifying as Uzbek, 3.8% as Ukrainian, and 6.9% as members of other ethnic groups. This diversity allowed the study to explore how language use and preferences vary across different ethnic communities, which is particularly important in a multilingual society like Kazakhstan.

The educational background of the respondents was another key factor in the study, as it plays a significant role in shaping language use and preferences. The survey categorized respondents according to their highest level of educational attainment. Approximately 37.1% of participants had completed secondary education, representing those who had completed the general education curriculum. A further 35.4% had attained vocational education, indicating individuals with specialized training in various trades and professions. Higher education and postgraduate qualifications were reported by 27.4% of respondents, a group likely to occupy professional, managerial, or academic roles. This broad range of educational backgrounds allowed the study to assess how language policies and usage patterns might intersect with educational achievement.

The socio-professional status of respondents was also an important variable in the study. The research identified five predominant categories of employment: self-employed individuals, who made up 14.0% of the sample; employees in the private sector, who represented 13.9%; business owners with hired employees, comprising 13.8%; freelancers or individuals engaged in contract work, who made up 11.0%; and civil servants, who accounted for 8.6% of respondents. This range of professional backgrounds provides insight into how language is used in various sectors of the economy, particularly in relation to economic activities and employment contexts.

The study also considered non-working individuals. Pensioners, who represent a significant segment of the population due to Kazakhstan's aging demographic, accounted for 5.7% of respondents. Students, representing the younger generation still in the process of completing their education, made up 2.7% of the sample. Housewives, who may not be formally employed but play a crucial role in household management, accounted for 1.3% of respondents. Additionally, 0.7% of respondents reported being unable to work due to disability, providing valuable perspectives from a demographic that is often underrepresented in such studies.

The survey sought to capture a wide range of information from respondents, covering aspects related to language use, preferences, and proficiency in the Kazakhstani context. Questions posed to respondents included their language of daily communication, their attitudes toward state language policies, and their opinions on the role of the Kazakh language in public and professional life. Experts who participated in the study were also asked to provide their insights on the implementation of language policies, the effectiveness of current regulations, and potential areas for improvement.

Additionally, the focus groups provided qualitative data, offering a deeper understanding of the public's attitudes towards multilingualism, the role of Russian and other minority languages in Kazakhstani society, and the challenges associated with promoting the Kazakh language. This combination of quantitative and qualitative data allows for a comprehensive analysis of language policy issues in Kazakhstan.

In conclusion, this article presents a detailed examination of the current state of language policy in Kazakhstan, based on a robust sociological and analytical study. The findings provide valuable insights into the diverse linguistic landscape of the country, highlighting the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in promoting the Kazakh language while respecting the multilingual fabric of the nation. Further discussion on the study's results, including the perspectives of both respondents and experts, is presented in the following sections.

RESEARCH RESULTS

A sociological study was conducted to identify the situation in the development of language in Kazakhstan, determine the level and scope of application of the language. Expert opinions and recommendations for further development of the language situation were obtained.

Table 1. *Which language do you consider your native? (%)*

City	Kazakh	Russian	Other languages
Abay region	78.6	16.2	5.2
Akmola region	51.8	32.2	15.9
Aktobe region	79.7	14.1	6.3
Almaty region	72.0	10.2	17.8
Atyrau region	76.5	5.3	18.2
West-Kazakhstan region	76.4	18.8	4.9
Jambyl region	72.8	9.4	17.9
Zhetisu region	74.6	13.6	11.9
Karaganda region	52.2	35.1	12.7
Kostanay region	41.5	40.5	18.0
Kyzylorda region	95.7	1.8	2.4
Mangistau region	93.7	2.8	3.5
Pavlodar region	53.0	35.1	11.9
North-Kazakhstan region	35.2	49.2	15.6
Turkestan region	76.1	1.8	22.1
Ulytau region	75.6	14.1	10.3
East Kazakhstan region	60.8	35.1	4.1
Astana city	78.8	12.3	8.8
Almaty city	60.0	24.2	15.8
Shymkent city	68.5	7.9	23.6

Source: Committee on Language Policy of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

The results showed that predominantly the population of the southern and western regions consider the Kazakh language their native language, and the northern ones - Russian. The reason for this is the ethnic composition that has historically developed in these regions. So, in Kyzylorda (95.7%), Mangistau (93.7%), Aktobe (79.7%). Whereas in Kostanay (41.5%) and North Kazakhstan (35.2%) regions. On the contrary, the native language is Russian in the North Kazakhstan region – 49.2% of respondents (Table 1). There are demographic reasons for this, which have developed in Kazakhstan since the Soviet period.

Moreover, according to the official website of the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2024), Kazakhs in the population are the majority, while the survey shows that only 81.0% of the population speak the state language, 48.7% have a good command of the state language, only 18.5% speak and read the state language fluently. At the same time, those who do not speak the Kazakh language amounted to 19.0%.

Table 2. Please rate your level of proficiency in the state, Russian, English languages and the language of your ethnic group (%)

Language	Don't speak at all	Understand Certain phrases	Understand well, but I don' t speak	Understand and can explain myself	Cannot write poorly	Speak fluently	Language proficiency
Kazakh language	7.4	11.6	6.8	7.0	18.5	48.7	81.0
Russian language	0.5	8.9	7.2	20.3	11.2	51.8	90.6
English language	35.8	35.2	12.8	10.2	1.0	5.0	29.0
The language of your ethnic group	-	3.4	12.4	5.2	8.5	70.6	96.7
Fluent in three languages	28.1	42.9	12.8	5.0	5.2	6.0	29.0

Source: Committee on Language Policy of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Sociological research shows an interesting fact is that while the majority of Kazakhs in the country speak the Kazakh language less than Russian (90.6%). 9.4% of the population do not speak Russian (Table 2). There is a unique situation in Kazakhstan, where the vast majority of the population knows Russian, and a very small part knows Kazakh, which is also a consequence of the policy of the Soviet government.

Table 3. Knowledge of the Kazakh language by region (%)

Aktobe region	40.6	34.9	7.8	11.5	5.2
Almaty region	35.5	32.6	10.2	10.5	11.2
Atyrau region	27.3	30.3	13.6	9.1	19.7
West-Kazakhstan region	46.5	31.9	8.3	10.4	2.8

Jambyl region	30.8	33.0	12.1	9.4	14.7
Zhetisu region	44.1	35.6	6.8	9.3	4.2
Karaganda region	30.3	31.6	11.0	14.5	12.7
Kostanay region	29.0	33.5	11.5	12.0	14.0
Kyzylorda region	58.5	22.6	6.7	9.1	3.0
Mangistau region	43.7	21.8	9.9	7.0	17.6
Pavlodar region	33.9	32.1	12.5	16.7	4.8
North-Kazakhstan region	15.6	33.6	16.4	16.4	18.0
Turkestan region	33.2	37.9	9.2	9.2	10.5
Ulytau region	42.3	34.6	10.3	11.5	1.3
East Kazakhstan region	29.7	33.8	12.2	10.1	14.2
Astana city	37.7	32.7	10.0	9.2	10.4
Almaty city	34.2	30.1	16.0	9.7	10.0
Shymkent city	37.5	32.9	10.6	6.9	12.0

Source: Committee on Language Policy of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Accordingly, in everyday life, residents of the western, southern and central regions speak only Kazakh, and in the northern part of the country they use Kazakh less often (Table 3). The sociological study once again shows the imbalance in the settlement of the population, which affects the formation of a united nation.

Table 4. Please rate your level of proficiency in the state, Russian, English and the language of one's ethnic group (%)

Answer options	Kazakhs	Russians	Other
I don't speak at all	0.1	12.8	36.8
I understand certain phrases	0.5	44.7	22.7
I understand well, but I don't speak	2.5	17.4	15.1
I understand and can explain myself	1.6	18.6	18.6
I speak and read fluently, but I write poorly	25.7	2.2	4.1
I speak fluently	69.5	4.3	2.8

Source: Committee on Language Policy of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Sociological research has shown that the majority of representatives of the Kazakh ethnic group speak the state language; on the contrary, representatives of the Russian and other ethnic groups do not speak the Kazakh language – 12.8% and 36.8%, respectively. At the same time, only 18.6% of both ethnic Russians and representatives of other nationalities understand and can explain themselves, which is a very low level (Table 4).

Table 5. *Russian language proficiency (%)*

Answer options	Kazakhs	Russians	Other
I don't speak at all	0.7	-	0.2
I understand certain phrases	13.3	1.1	1.8
I understand well, but I don't speak	8.9	1.4	2.0
I understand and can explain myself	24.8	14.2	5.9
I speak and read fluently, but I write poorly	12.4	8.0	9.6
I speak fluently	39.9	75.3	80.5

Source: Committee on Language Policy of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

On the contrary, representatives of all ethnic groups of Kazakhstan speak Russian well. For example, 75.3% of Russians and 80.5% of representatives of other ethnic groups are fluent in Russian (Table 5). Another example showed by sociological research is that in Kazakhstan, the majority of the population speaks more Russian than Kazakh.

Table 6. *Average language proficiency level for 2020-2023 (%)*

Language proficiency level	2020	2021	2022	2023	Average value for 2020-2023
Kazakh language	90.0	91.0	92.0	81.0	88.5
Russian language	90.0	90.2	90.4	90.6	90.3
English language	27.0	28.0	28.5	29.0	28.1
The language of ethnic group	97.1	97.2	97.1	96.7	97.0
Fluent in three languages	20.0	27.0	27.9	29.0	25.9

Source: Committee on Language Policy of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

A comparative sociological analysis of the level of language development in 2020-2023 showed that the level of proficiency in the Kazakh language decreased in 2023 compared to previous years, while proficiency in Russian and English increased (Table 6).

Table 7. *What language do you use in your daily life? (%)*

Public spheres	Years	Only in Kazakh	More in Kazakh	Equally in Kazakh and Russian	More in Russian	Only in Russian	Other
In shopping centers, shops, markets	2022	8.8	13.2	36.2	26.0	15.9	-
	2023	6.6	27.6	39.8	11.6	14.5	-
In public transport	2022	9.3	11.9	39.9	20.8	18.3	-
	2023	3.6	29.3	31.8	20.5	14.9	-
In intercity transport (buses, trains, planes)	2022	7.6	9.3	39.8	21.0	21.3	1.1
	2023	5.1	28.4	32.9	14.9	18.3	0.3
In educational institutions	2022	9.1	29.3	31.8	14.2	15.4	0.3
	2023	6.2	28.9	35.6	13.3	15.9	0.1
In healthcare facilities	2022	10.8	16.9	38.0	15.6	18.8	-
	2023	5.3	29.1	36.0	17.2	12.5	-
In akimats, state self-government bodies	2022	13.1	16.5	36.6	15.2	18.8	-
	2023	14.0	32.1	25.9	14.7	13.4	-
In banks	2022	9.6	15.5	37.3	17.8	19.8	0.1
	2023	9.7	30.8	29.2	15.6	14.8	-
In public service centers	2022	12.3	16.9	35.0	17.3	18.6	-
	2023	13.5	29.7	25.2	15.6	16.1	-
In cinemas, theaters, museums	2022	6.4	12.7	38.3	20.3	22.4	-
	2023	12.1	24.4	32.9	25.1	5.4	-
In the police	2022	9.5	16.5	39.7	15.8	18.6	-
	2023	7.8	30.5	31.2	14.9	15.7	-
In CAO	2022	7.6	12.7	41.7	17.1	21.0	0.1
	2023	11.3	25.6	33.5	13.3	16.3	-
In cafes, restaurants	2022	6.2	11.3	37.9	20.6	24.2	-
	2023	7.9	27.5	26.6	18.0	20.1	-
At work	2022	8.6	14.4	41.0	16.1	19.7	0.3
	2023	10.8	26.7	33.3	19.9	9.4	-

Source: Committee on Language Policy of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

The Kazakh language is used mainly in government institutions, and Russian in the private sector. Both languages are used equally in shopping centers, shops, markets, health care and education institutions (Table 7). As the study shows, the Kazakh language is used in narrow areas, while Russian is used in all spheres of public relations.

Table 8. Name the main reason using Kazakh/Russian/other languages in everyday life, by region (%)

City	I don't speak other languages	My surroundings speak only Kazakh	My surroundings speak only Russian	This is convenient for me	My environment speaks Kazakh and Russian
Abay region	-	73.4	13.6	9.7	3.2
Akmola region	5.5	33.5	61.0	-	-
Aktobe region	1.0	65.6	22.9	7.8	2.6
Almaty region	3.0	53.6	36.8	4.9	1.6
Atyrau region	5.3	40.9	53.8	-	-
West-Kazakhstan region	-	70.8	16.7	9.0	3.5
Jambyl region	4.0	44.2	48.7	2.7	0.4
Zhetisu region	0.8	72.0	14.4	9.3	3.4
Karaganda region	3.5	45.6	46.9	3.1	0.9
Kostanay region	3.5	51.0	39.5	4.5	1.5
Kyzylorda region	1.2	63.4	26.2	6.7	2.4
Mangistau region	4.2	42.3	48.6	3.5	1.4
Pavlodar region	2.4	56.0	32.7	6.5	2.4
North-Kazakhstan region	4.9	33.6	61.5	-	-
Turkestan region	2.9	52.9	38.4	4.2	1.6
Ulytau region	-	71.8	14.1	11.5	2.6
East Kazakhstan region	4.1	45.9	45.3	3.4	1.4
Astana city	2.3	57.3	32.7	5.8	1.9
Almaty city	3.2	48.3	43.1	4.1	1.3
Shymkent city	3.2	49.5	31.5	3.7	12.0

Source: Committee on Language Policy of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

At the same time, the population began to speak more Kazakh in everyday life, the number of people whose environment spoke only the state language increased by 32.2% compared to 2022 (20.5% in 2022, 52.7% in 2023) (Table 8).

Table 9. *For what reasons are you planning to leave the country? (%)*

Answer options	Quantity	%
Ignorance of the state language	72	17.2
Poor prospects for socio-economic development	52	12.4
Unhealthy environment, environmental problems	-	
Unsatisfactory social status and minimal social guarantees	86	20.6
The threat of religious extremism and terrorism	6	1.4
Problems of learning the Kazakh language	62	14.8
Desire to travel to your historical homeland	37	8.9
Constant difficulties in solving the housing problem	223	53.3
Threat of discrimination based on language	27	6.5
Poor medical care	3	0.7
Difficulties in obtaining quality education for children	37	8.9
Desire to change the situation, environment, climate	190	45.5
Solving problems in your personal life	82	19.6
Threat of Religious Harassment	53	12.7
Threat of harassment based on ethnicity	-	
Career	53	12.7
Children's future	42	10.0
High standard of living in another country	57	13.6
Prospects for improving social status	-	-
Reunions with relatives	-	-

Source: Committee on Language Policy of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Sociological research has shown that the ongoing state language policy is not the reason for migration from Kazakhstan. According to respondents, the main reasons for migration are housing problems and the desire to change the situation, environment, and climate. Only 17.5% of the population consider the reason for migration to be ignorance of the state language (Table 9).

Table 10. *For what reasons are you planning to leave the country? by ethnic group*

Answer options		Kazakhs	Russians	Other
Ignorance of the state language	Quantity	32	18	22
	%	27	15	9.4
Poor prospects for socio-economic development	Quantity	27	15	10
	%	4.8	5.6	4.3
Unhealthy environment, environmental problems	Quantity	0	0	0
	%	0	0	0
Unsatisfactory social status and minimal social guarantees	Quantity	46	23	17
	%	8.1	8.6	7.2
The threat of religious extremism and terrorism	Quantity	4	1	1
	%	0.7	0.4	0.4
Problems of learning the Kazakh language	Quantity	50	7	5
	%	8.8	2.6	2.1
Desire to travel to your historical homeland	Quantity	30	5	2
	%	5.3	1.9	0.9
Constant difficulties in solving the housing problem	Quantity	114	56	53
	%	20.2	21.1	22.6
Threat of discrimination based on language	Quantity	18	6	3
	%	3.2	2.3	1.3
Poor medical care	Quantity	1	0	2
	%	0.2	0	0.9
Difficulties in obtaining quality education for children	Quantity	29	6	2
	%	5.1	2.3	0.9
Desire to change the situation, environment, climate	Quantity	70	64	56
	%	12.4	24.1	23.8
Solving problems in your personal life	Quantity	35	25	22
	%	6.2	9.4	9.4
Threat of Religious Harassment	Quantity	34	2	1
	%	6.0	0.8	0.4
Threat of harassment based on ethnicity	Quantity	0	0	0
	%	0	0	0
Career	Quantity	16	18	19
	%	2.8	6.8	8.1
Children's future	Quantity	39	2	1
	%	6.9	0.8	0.4
High standard of living in another country	Quantity	20	18	19
	%	3.5	6.8	8.1
Prospects for improving social status	Quantity	0	0	0
	%	0	0	0
Reunions with relatives	Quantity	0	0	0
	%	0	0	0

Source: Committee on Language Policy of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

If you look in the context of ethnic groups, then representatives of the Russian ethnic group believe that the main reasons for representatives of Russian and other ethnic groups moving from the country include the desire to change the situation, the environment, the climate – 24.1% (Table 10).

Table 11. *What language do you use for obtaining information on Internet resources? by region (%)*

City	Kazakh	Russian	English	Kazakh and Russian
Abay region	51.1	26.3	-	22.6
Akmola region	17.1	77.4	5.5	-
Aktobe region	43.9	37.4	1.2	17.5
Almaty region	32.9	53.4	3.2	10.6
Atyrau region	17.4	77.3	5.3	-
West-Kazakhstan region	48.0	30.4	-	21.6
Jambyl Region	25.5	64.8	4.2	5.6
Zhetisu region	49.5	29.1	1.0	20.4
Karaganda region	26.0	63.5	3.7	6.8
Kostanay region	30.9	57.4	3.7	8.0
Kyzylorda Region	40.5	42.6	1.4	15.5
Mangistau region	24.8	65.7	4.4	5.1
Pavlodar region	35.5	49.7	2.6	12.3
North-Kazakhstan region	16.4	78.7	4.9	-
Turkestan region	32.4	54.6	3.1	9.9
Ulytau region	50.0	25.8	-	24.2
East Kazakhstan region	27.3	62.2	4.2	6.3
Astana city	36.0	49.0	2.5	12.6
Almaty city	28.4	60.0	3.4	8.2
Shymkent city	30.0	58.6	3.4	7.9

Source: Committee on Language Policy of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

There is also a correlation with ethnic composition in the choice of language when receiving information. Thus, information from the Internet in Russian is received mainly by residents of the North Kazakhstan (78.7%) and Akmola (77.4%) regions. Residents of the Ulytau (24.2%) and Abay (22.6%) regions most often receive information in Kazakh and Russian. There is also a correlation with ethnic composition in the choice of language when receiving information. Thus, information from the Internet in Russian is received mainly by residents of the North Kazakhstan (78.7%) and Akmola (77.4%) regions. Residents of the Ulytau (24.2%) and Abay (22.6%) regions most often receive information in Kazakh and Russian (Table 11).

Table 12. *What changes, in your opinion, should be included in the current Law on Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan? (%)*

Answer options	%
The current law reflects the language needs of the population as fully as possible and does not need to be changed	28
The role and functions of the Kazakh language should be expanded as much as possible, thus we will create conditions under which all groups of the population will be fully proficient in the state language	52
It is necessary to give social status to the English language, this will contribute to its greater use in Kazakh realities	8,0
I think changes are needed taking into account the introduction of trilingual education, that is, Kazakh, Russian and English languages should be equivalent and equal in rights	12
Other	-

Source: Committee on Language Policy of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Half of the experts surveyed (52%) believe that the role and functions of the Kazakh language should be expanded as much as possible; a third of experts (28%) believe that the current law reflects the language needs of the population as fully as possible and does not need to be changed. Other experts believe (12%) that changes are needed taking into account the introduction of trilingual education, that is, Kazakh, Russian and English languages should be equivalent and equal (Table 12).

Table 13. *In your opinion, what kind of linguistic communicative environment has developed in Kazakhstan today? (%)*

Answer options	%
Bilingualism, equal use of both Russian and Kazakh languages	48.0
Dominance of the Kazakh language	8.0
Dominance of the Russian language	32.0
Even use of Kazakh and Russian languages and minor use of English	12.0
Other	-

Source: Committee on Language Policy of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Experts note that bilingualism has developed in Kazakhstan, in which Russian and Kazakh languages are used equally (48%), a third of experts believe (32%) that the Russian language dominates. Other experts believe that there is an even use of the Kazakh and Russian languages and a slight use of English (12%) (Table 13).

Table 14. *What problems in your opinion, hinder the development of the state language in the country? (%)*

Answer options	%
Lack of quality textbooks, teaching aids and scientific literature in schools, colleges and universities	34.0
Inadequate teaching of the Kazakh language, problems of methodology and low quality of teaching literature	6.0
Low level of Kazakh-language content in all professional fields or its absence in general	22.0
An example of linguistic neglect by the managerial elite	6.0
Equal language capabilities for using the Russian language in official practice	8.0
Low quality of television and radio programs, magazines, films produced in the state language	6.0
Lack of adequate social prospects for the individual	14.0
Changes in the language sphere, for example, changing the alphabet, etc.	4.0
Poor teaching of the Kazakh language in Russian schools	-

Source: Committee on Language Policy of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

The development of the Kazakh language is hampered by a number of reasons, according to experts. Thus, 34% of experts believe that in secondary, secondary specialized and higher educational institutions there is a lack of quality textbooks, teaching aids and scientific literature, 22.0% of experts noted the low level of Kazakh-language content in all professional fields or its absence in general.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings presented in the introductory section underscore the pivotal role of language as a fundamental tool in nation-building efforts. In the case of Kazakhstan, where the Kazakh ethnic group constitutes the state-forming majority, the initiation of a comprehensive nation-building process is likely to face significant challenges. This article examines the complexities of language dynamics within the multi-ethnic context of Kazakhstan, drawing on the results of a sociological survey conducted in 2023.

One of the primary challenges to nation-building in Kazakhstan stems from the historical and regional ethnic distribution of the population. The northeastern regions of the country have long been predominantly populated by ethnic Russians and other Slavic groups, who traditionally communicate in Russian. As a result, Kazakh is more widely spoken in the southern, western, and central regions of

Kazakhstan. This regional linguistic division complicates the broader process of nation-building, as linguistic and ethnic heterogeneity can contribute to societal fragmentation. Scholars have noted that such ethnic and linguistic diversity can serve as a “source of democratic instability and regional self-confidence,” (Adelola, 2023), highlighting the potential risks associated with managing multi-ethnic and multilingual societies.

The study’s findings indicate that despite the official promotion of bilingualism, Russian remains the dominant language in interethnic communication. While Kazakhs increasingly acquire proficiency in Russian, other ethnic groups, in turn, rely almost exclusively on Russian for communication, both among themselves and with Kazakhs. This linguistic imbalance is particularly notable in everyday and professional contexts, where Kazakh remains confined primarily to use among ethnic Kazakhs, while Russian serves as the *lingua franca* among different ethnic communities.

This linguistic dynamic complicates nation-building efforts, as it undermines the goal of promoting the Kazakh language as a unifying tool for interethnic communication. Instead, the Kazakh language continues to face challenges in penetrating other ethnic groups, who show limited motivation to learn and use it.

Another significant challenge highlighted by the research is the overwhelming consumption of media and information in Russian by both Kazakhs and other ethnic groups. The study suggests that Kazakh-language content is either insufficient in volume or fails to attract the interest of the population. As a result, Russian media remains the dominant source of information, entertainment, and educational materials. This trend has further contributed to the entrenchment of Russian as the primary language of communication in many aspects of daily life, including the dissemination of knowledge and culture.

Experts consulted in the study emphasized that one of the key obstacles to the development of the Kazakh language lies in the insufficient availability of high-quality educational resources, particularly textbooks and scientific literature. Moreover, the lack of comprehensive Kazakh-language content across various professional fields has impeded the language's advancement. Despite these challenges, there are indications that the situation is gradually improving. The publication of technical and scientific literature in Kazakh is increasing, and in certain academic disciplines, Kazakh is being used alongside Russian and other languages (Koptleuova, 2021). This shift reflects the growing importance of Kazakh in educational and professional contexts.

The demographic composition of Kazakhstan is undergoing significant changes, which are likely to have long-term implications for language policy. According to the 2021 national census, Kazakhs now make up 70.4% of the population, while Russians account for 15.5%. Over the past three decades, three notable trends have emerged in the educational system:

The proportion of students attending Kazakh-language schools has increased substantially, from 32.3% to 66.0%. The number of students enrolled in schools that teach in minority languages (such as Uyghur, Uzbek, and Tajik) or foreign languages (such as English and Turkish) has also grown, rising from 2.6% to 4.5%. The number of Russian-language schools has decreased sharply, from 66.0% to 29.5%. These trends suggest that the role of Russian as a language of instruction is gradually declining across all levels of education. For the first time since 2007, the number of students receiving their education in Kazakh has exceeded those studying in Russian. This shift is especially evident in higher education, where the dominance of Russian has been steadily eroding since 2009 (Suleimenova, 2023; Smagulova, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the sociological survey results, it is evident that, in the short term, the prospects for successful nation-building through the promotion of the Kazakh language remain limited. The concentration of ethnic Russians and other non-Kazakh groups in the northeastern regions of the country, combined with their reliance on Russian for interethnic communication, presents a significant barrier to the widespread adoption of Kazakh. Despite efforts to promote bilingualism, the dominance of the Russian language persists, largely due to the continued use of Russian by non-Kazakh ethnic groups and the growing proficiency of Kazakhs in Russian.

At the same time, there are signs of gradual progress. The number of individuals using Kazakh as their primary language of communication is increasing, and the growing proportion of Kazakhs in the population is likely to accelerate the spread of the language. If current demographic trends continue, the Kazakh language may eventually gain dominance in more spheres of public and professional life.

However, at present, the Kazakh language has not yet achieved the level of distribution necessary to serve as the foundation for a unified nation-building project in Kazakhstan. The government must address key challenges, including the development of high-quality educational resources, the production of engaging Kazakh-language media content, and the promotion of Kazakh as a language of interethnic communication, if it is to achieve its long-term nation-building goals.

In conclusion, while the Kazakh language's influence is increasing, significant obstacles remain to its full integration into all spheres of life in Kazakhstan. A comprehensive and sustained policy effort is required to ensure that the Kazakh language can fulfill its intended role as a central element of national identity and cohesion.

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