

# Students' Multilingual Practices in the English Classroom in Kazakhstan

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**Abstract**—This study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussions of multilingualism in the English classroom and intends to explore forms of multilingualism in a formal classroom context, being the first effort to document Kazakh students' authentic interactions involving Kazakh, Russian and English in the English classroom. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study investigates the use of languages and types of multilingualism in students' group discussions, supported by quantitative and qualitative data from a sociolinguistic survey. The results reveal a dynamic and integrated use of English, Russian and Kazakh during formal student discussions, with English being dominant and Russian and Kazakh making significant contributions. Kazakh students are shown to engage in diverse multilingual behaviors, including various forms of code-switching (intra-sentential, extra-sentential, intra-word) serving different functions (such as reference, discourse markers and structural roles). Survey results indicate harmonious interaction among the three languages and frequent multilingual usage, underscoring the fluid and integrated language practices in Kazakhstan's educational settings. Although opinions vary on whether students should adhere to using a single language in certain contexts, the common practice and positive view of employing multiple languages is recognized. These findings highlight students' flexible multilingual competence, which supports adaptable communication shaped by context. The study offers valuable empirical evidence for language policy, teaching methods and sociolinguistic theory in multilingual post-Soviet environments.

**Index Terms**—multilingualism, code-switching, sociolinguistics, language practice, university students

## I. INTRODUCTION

Research on multilingualism in English classrooms across the globe is a vibrant and rapidly growing area, mirroring the increasing linguistic diversity found in educational contexts. Over the last ten years, there has been a remarkable rise in studies on multilingualism within ESL and EFL settings, with a particular emphasis on teachers' viewpoints and instructional methods (Burner & Carlsen, 2023). Some research focuses on how students position themselves in relation to language, which affects their engagement and motivation, enabling them to actively shape their multilingual identities both inside and outside the classroom (Weidl & Erling, 2025). Additionally, investigations highlight the variety of language practices students employ and uncover the sociolinguistic complexities inherent in multilingual

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educational environments (Tai et al., 2025). These studies commonly emphasize the necessity of acknowledging and incorporating students' multilingual language practices into teaching approaches to support effective learning.

Recent research on multilingual education highlights the dominant role of English as a second language or a primary medium of instruction (Sahr, 2020). However, unlike many European and Asian nations, Kazakhstan lacks the natural conditions for English to develop as an actively used language, which shapes the unique nature of multilingualism in the country. In recent years, Kazakhstan has undertaken significant reforms in its education system, prioritizing multilingual education as a strategic response to the nation's social and economic realities (Zhumay et al., 2021). According to this governmental initiative, education serves as a "conveyor belt" for building a multilingual society (Agbo et al., 2022), aiming for proficiency in three languages: Kazakh as the state language, Russian as the language of interethnic communication and English as the language of international communication. This distinct context in Kazakhstani education calls for the development of a new multilingual education model, where knowledge of Kazakh, Russian and English creates favorable opportunities for integration into global education, science, and technology (Nurlanova et al., 2022; Yeskeldiyeva & Tazhibayeva, 2015) while simultaneously preserving national and ethnic identity (Pangereyev et al., 2023).

Given the significant role of English in academic and professional fields (Shunkeyeva et al., 2020), English classrooms in Kazakhstan serve as important settings for examining multilingualism as a complex and evolving reflection of the country's linguistic situation. Goodman et al. (2024) explore how English-medium instruction (EMI) is implemented within Kazakhstan's distinct sociolinguistic environment, where English is promoted alongside the predominant local languages, Kazakh and Russian. Zhunussova et al. (2023) study how multilingual students at EMI universities in Kazakhstan construct their identities, showing how they navigate between local and global cultural affiliations. Utegenova et al. (2024) emphasize the linguistic characteristics of student speech, highlighting frequent and purposeful code-switching among Kazakh, Russian and English in academic interactions. Their sociolinguistic survey data indicate that the simultaneous use of these three languages in education reflects the trilingualism policy aimed at preparing skilled professionals fluent in Kazakh, Russian and English. Nonetheless, survey findings from Kurmanova et al. (2024) reveal that Kazakh students still struggle to clearly understand how these languages can be integrated effectively in specialized subject studies and what advantages such integration might offer for effective communication in the classroom.

Although there is increasing interest in exploring Kazakh students' attitudes toward multilingualism within the educational setting, there has been limited focus on how the three languages actually interact during English classes. This study represents the first effort to document Kazakh students' verbal interactions involving Kazakh, Russian and English throughout the learning process. Employing a mixed-methods design, the research examines how students utilize and blend these three languages in a formal classroom context, highlighting the relevant use of languages and types of multilingualism in group discussions in English lessons. By analyzing authentic student conversations alongside responses from a sociolinguistic survey, the study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussions of multilingualism in the English classroom while providing evidence to inform language education policies and practices both in Kazakhstan and other multilingual environments.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### A. Research Design

The current study employs an embedded mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011) and unfolds in two stages. The first stage involves the analysis of Kazakh university students' use of Kazakh, Russian, and English during group discussions. The second stage consists of an online survey assessing students' perceptions and attitudes towards multilingualism within the educational process. Such a design integrates qualitative and quantitative data (group discussions) within a broader quantitative and qualitative framework (survey), allowing for a comprehensive exploration of multilingual practices and attitudes. The mixed-methods approach enables the study to benefit from the depth of qualitative insights while grounding findings in quantitative evidence, enhancing overall understanding of students' multilingual competencies and perspectives.

### B. Participants

The study sample includes 446 undergraduate students, aged 17 to 21, enrolled in multilingual groups with different specializations in the Pedagogy field at K. Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University, Kazakhstan. All 446 students participated in the online survey, and 27 agreed to participate in group discussions in class. Table 1 presents the frequencies (percentages) of variables such as age, gender, native language, major, and year of study within the sample.

TABLE 1  
SAMPLE PROFILE

Variable	Frequency	
Age	17	146 (32.7%)
	18	248 (55.6%)
	19	37 (8.4%)
	20	10 (2.2%)
	21	5 (1.1%)
Gender	Female	304 (68.2%)
	Male	142 (31.8%)
Native language	Kazakh	436 (97.8%)
	Russian	8 (1.8%)
	Uzbek	2 (0.4%)
Major	Biology	88 (19.7%)
	Chemistry	22 (4.9%)
	Computer Science	43 (9.6%)
	Economics	12 (2.8%)
	Foreign Language	16 (3.6%)
	Geography	10 (2.2%)
	Law	73 (16.4%)
	Mathematics	78 (17.5%)
	Physics	104 (23.3%)
Year of studies	First, Bachelor	387 (86.9%)
	Second, Bachelor	54 (12.2%)
	Third, Bachelor	0 (0%)
	Fourth, Bachelor	4 (0.9%)

As seen from Table 1, the majority of research participants are 18 years old, forming 55.6% of the research sample. The gender distribution in the sample shows that female participants (68.2%) outnumber male students (31.8%) by more than two to one. This imbalance can be attributed to the common trend at K. Zhubanov Aktope Regional University, where females predominantly enroll in Pedagogy programs. This pattern aligns with the broader observation that Pedagogy fields generally attract more female students, unlike technical universities, which tend to have a majority of male students (Aleshinskaya & Vasilieva, 2025). Furthermore, this corresponds with findings by Lippa et al. (2014), who note that women are more likely than men to work in people-centered professions such as teaching.

A predominant majority (97.8%) of students identify Kazakh as their native language. The research participants are distributed across diverse specializations, with the highest percentages in Physics (23.3%), Biology (19.7%) and Mathematics (17.5%). Other fields include Law (16.4%), Computer Science (9.6%), Chemistry (4.9%), Foreign Language (3.6%), Economics (2.8%) and Geography (2.2%). Most students (86.9%) are in their first year of the bachelor's program, with a smaller proportion (12.2%) in the second year.

Regarding the level of proficiency in three languages, most respondents reported having an Advanced proficiency level in Kazakh, while a vast majority indicated an Intermediate proficiency level for both Russian and English. Moreover, Pre-Intermediate and Elementary proficiency levels were primarily selected in relation to English. Figure 1 shows the distribution of proficiency levels in Kazakh, Russian, and English within the research sample.

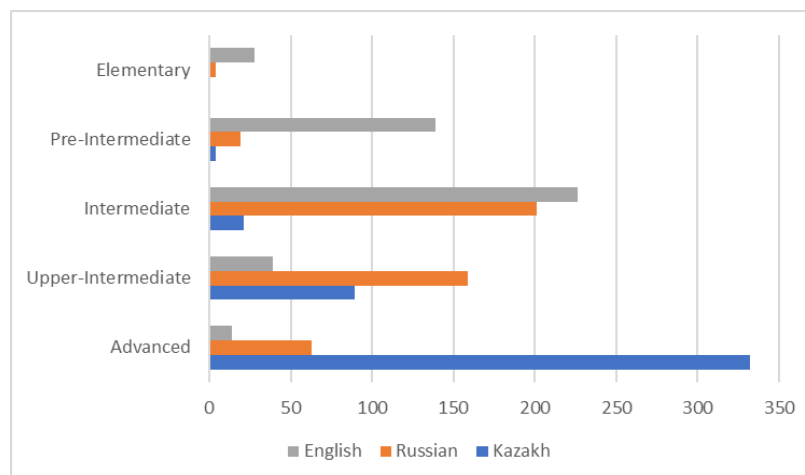


Figure 1. Level of Proficiency in Three Languages

Figure 2 presents how respondents identify themselves as having different forms of multilingualism, reflecting the prevalent multilingual practices among the surveyed students. According to the figure, the largest group (59.2%) identify with the Kazakh-Russian or Russian-Kazakh bilingualism. This is consistent with Kazakhstan's sociolinguistic context, where Kazakh and Russian are the two dominant languages used in daily communication, education and administration (Zharkynbekova & Chernyavskaya, 2022). The second-largest group (26.7%) identify as Kazakh-

Russian-English trilingual speakers. This substantial number indicates that English is increasingly integrated into the linguistic repertoire of many students, reflecting its growing importance as a language of international communication and academic instruction (Kurmanova et al., 2023). Interestingly, although enrolled in a trilingual educational program, 61.9% of respondents identify themselves as bilingual rather than trilingual.

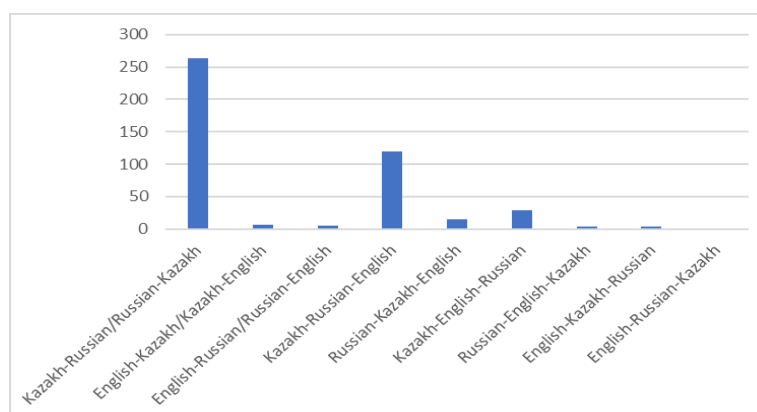


Figure 2. Forms of Multilingualism

### C. Data Collection

The data for this study, both qualitative and quantitative, were collected through an online survey and observations of students' speech in Kazakh, Russian and English. Multilingual students' conversations were recorded while they discussed topics assigned by the researchers, focusing on foreign language learning and the use of different languages in various contexts. These discussions were conducted and recorded via Zoom and subsequently transcribed. Prior to the discussions, students were organized into five groups of 5–6 participants each and given 10 minutes to talk about the assigned topic. To assist students who struggled to maintain the conversation, prompts were displayed on the screen to encourage ongoing dialogue.

The online survey was conducted among undergraduate students enrolled in multilingual educational programs at K. Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University, utilizing Google Forms. It included 12 closed-ended and 2 open-ended items structured as statements and divided into two main sections. Responses to the closed-ended questions were collected using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Participants were encouraged to provide detailed answers to the open-ended questions. The first section of the survey comprised 6 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question focused on forms of multilingualism and the relative use of languages in the English classroom (Questions 1–7). The second section also contained 6 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question, concentrating on students' attitudes toward multilingualism in the English classroom (Questions 8–14). All participants provided informed consent to participate in the study and for their responses to be used for research purposes.

### D. Data Analysis

The analysis of the student discussion data involved analyzing the textual properties and socio-pragmatic use of instances of multilingualism. The textual analysis dealt with how Russian and English insertions are embedded in Kazakh texts, with a focus on such formal features as morphology, word patterning, language proportions and types of code-switching such as intra-sentential, inter-sentential, extrasentential code-switching (Gumperz, 1982). The frequencies of words in each language were calculated using the software tool AntConc (Anthony, 2024), which is commonly employed in corpus linguistic research for lexical analysis. After that, we looked at the social context and pragmatic use of Russian and English elements, focusing on the functions of code-switching (Hamdan, 2023).

The quantitative survey data were processed using Google Sheets, which facilitated the calculation of frequencies and percentages for responses to the closed-ended questionnaire items. Interpretations of these responses were based on a 5-point Likert scale. For the qualitative data from the questionnaire, thematic analysis was conducted by interpreting the meanings in the respondents' detailed answers to the open-ended questions (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). This qualitative analysis helped identify key themes such as the use of multilingualism in the English classroom, the proportional use of three languages, the role of multilingualism in subject learning, access to information in three languages, and the importance of multilingualism for students' future careers. Integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods provided robust and credible insights into students' use of multilingualism in English classes and their attitudes toward multilingualism in higher education.

### III. FINDINGS

#### A. Student Discussion Results

The analysis of the students' discussions reveals the interconnected use of multiple languages, the frequency of words from each language, and the roles of code-switching within their conversations on researcher-assigned topics. The multilingual corpus created by the participants includes a total of 2,453 tokens, with 1,783 tokens (72.7%) in English, 420 tokens (17.1%) in Russian, 243 tokens (9.9%) in Kazakh, and 7 tokens (0.3%) that combine Russian and Kazakh elements. The proportions of these three languages in the students' discussions are illustrated in Figure 3.

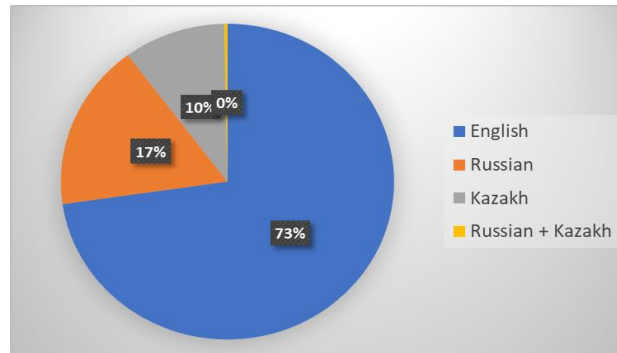


Figure 3. Share of Languages in Student Discussions

The following are the most commonly occurring words from the English, Russian and Kazakh languages in the corpus, each accompanied by their frequency in brackets. Included among the most frequently used English words are *I* (97), *in* (61), *the* (60), *and* (57), *to* (41), *it* (39), *you* (33), *English* (32), *a* (31), *language* (31). Among the most frequently used Russian words are *и* /i/ 'and' (20), *я* /ya/ 'I' (17), *на* /na/ 'on' (12), *что* /chto/ 'that' (9), *потому* /potomu/ 'because' (7), *в* /v/ 'in' (6), *не* /ne/ 'not' (6), *язык* /yazyk/ 'language' (6), *мне* /mne/ 'me' (5), *но* /no/ 'but' (5), *это* /eto/ 'this' (5). Among the most frequently used Kazakh words are *қазақша* /kazaksha/ 'Kazakh' (6), *күнделікті* /kyundelikti/ 'everyday' (5), *себебі* /sebebi/ 'because' (5), *тілі* /tili/ 'language' (5), *ағылшынша* /agylshynsha/ 'English' (4), *және* /zhene/ 'and' (4), *менің* /menin/ 'my' (4), *тілде* /tilde/ 'on language' (4). In addition to personal pronouns, the words often inserted from the Russian and Kazakh languages name the objects discussed in their conversations (languages) and provide speech coherence, being mainly conjunctions and prepositions.

A very little proportion (0.3%) of the words in the corpus are hybrid words combining elements from two languages, i.e. Russian roots and Kazakh affixes (underlined): *голды* /goldy/ 'his goal' (Possessive case, 3rd person singular), *видеода* /videoda/ 'in video' (Prepositional case, singular), *видеолар* /videolar/ 'video' (Nominative case, singular), *жанрын* /zhanryn/ 'genre' (Accusative case, singular), *алфавиті* /alfaviti/ 'its alphabet' (Possessive case, 3rd person singular), *отношениені* /otnosheniyeņi/ 'relationship' (Accusative case, singular), *мотивациялық* /motivatsiyalyk/ 'motivational' (Nominative case, singular). In terms of grammatical meaning, six of these hybrid Russian-Kazakh words are represented by nouns, while *мотивациялық* /motivatsiyalyk/ is represented by an adjective.

Students' conversations show frequent code-switching, involving all three languages at lexical and phrasal levels. The corpus revealed 198 instances where conversations switched from English, the primary language during group discussions, to Russian and Kazakh. In terms of code-switching types, intra-sentential switching was the most common, occurring 49.5% of the time toward Russian and 32.8% toward Kazakh. Inter-sentential code-switching appeared considerably less frequently – 7.6% for Russian and 6.6% for Kazakh. Additionally, 3.5% of cases involved hybrid words, which combine a Russian root and a Kazakh affix within a single word, representing intra-word code-switching (Stefanich et al., 2019). Figure 4 summarizes types of code-switching in the group discussions.

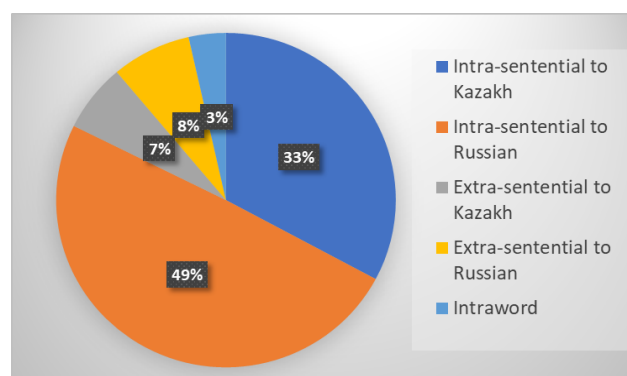


Figure 4. Distribution by Types of Code-Switching

The most common code-switching functions in the students' discussions are referential and discourse marker. The referential function is performed by switching to a different language due to lack of lexical knowledge or lexical equivalence (Hamdan, 2023). This can be demonstrated with examples (1-2) from the students' conversations, where a speaker, unable to remember the English terms for concepts like "window", "friends" and "text", resorts to using a word from Russian (R) or Kazakh (K) to more easily convey their meaning:

- (1) *Language is a*                      *окно*                      *into another world.*  
 /Language is a                      okno                      into another world/  
 'Language is a                      window (R)                      into another world.'
- (2) *But with my*                      *достарыммен,*                      *я обычно переписываюсь*                      *қазақша*  
 /But with my                      dostarymмен                      ya obychno perepisyvayus'                      kazaksha/  
 'But with my                      with my friends (K),                      I usually text (R)'                      in Kazakh (K)
- или по-русски.*  
 /ili po-russki/  
 'or in Russian (R).'

The discourse marker role of code-switching is the second function identified most frequently among students in their discussions. This feature is manifested through the use of linking words from Russian (*потому что* /potomu cho/ 'because', *и* /i/ 'and') and Kazakh (*себеби* /sebebi/ 'because', *және* /zhene/ 'and') within English conversations to establish cohesion or indicate a transition between ideas, which is demonstrated in the example below (3):

- (3) *Потому что*                      *it's my native language*                      *және*                      *мне так удобно.*  
 /Potomu chto                      it's my native language                      zhene                      mne tak udobno/  
 'Because (R)                      it's my native language                      and (K)                      for me it's so convenient (R).'

### B. Survey Results

Table 2 displays the quantitative data provided in the students' responses to the closed-ended questions of the questionnaire. It offers insights into students' perceptions and self-reported practices regarding the use of the Kazakh, Russian and English languages in the English classroom within a multilingual educational context.

TABLE 2  
 USE OF MULTILINGUALISM IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Question	Response	Frequency
1. I often encounter the use of Kazakh, Russian and English languages in the same context in the field of education.	I strongly agree.	143 (32.1%)
	I agree.	216 (48.4%)
	I neither agree nor disagree.	52 (11.7%)
	I disagree.	31 (7%)
	I strongly disagree.	4 (0.9%)
2. The Kazakh language predominates in the educational process.	I strongly agree.	218 (48.9%)
	I agree.	175 (39.2%)
	I neither agree nor disagree.	36 (8.1%)
	I disagree.	15 (3.4%)
3. The Russian language predominates in the educational process.	I strongly agree.	2 (0.4%)
	I strongly agree.	81 (18.2%)
	I agree.	225 (50.4%)
	I neither agree nor disagree.	68 (15.2%)
4. The English language predominates in the educational process.	I disagree.	66 (14.8%)
	I strongly disagree.	6 (1.3%)
	I strongly agree.	72 (16.1%)
	I agree.	177 (39.7%)
5. All three languages interact harmoniously in the educational process.	I neither agree nor disagree.	94 (21.1%)
	I disagree.	93 (20.9%)
	I strongly disagree.	10 (2.2%)
	I strongly agree.	137 (30.7%)
6. I often use all three languages in my learning.	I agree.	197 (44.2%)
	I neither agree nor disagree.	62 (13.9%)
	I disagree.	46 (10.3%)
	I strongly disagree.	4 (0.9%)
	I strongly agree.	101 (22.6%)
6. I often use all three languages in my learning.	I agree.	197 (44.2%)
	I neither agree nor disagree.	63 (14.1%)
	I disagree.	73 (16.4%)
	I strongly disagree.	12 (2.7%)
	I strongly agree.	101 (22.6%)

As seen from Table 2, a vast majority of respondents (80.5%) recognize the frequent presence of the three languages together in the educational process. Only a small number of students (7.9%) disagree, indicating a strong prevailing perception of active multilingual use within educational settings.

The next three questions deal with the predominance of each of the three languages under discussion. Respondents agree or strongly agree (88.1%) that Kazakh predominantly features in the educational process. Yet, opinions about Russian's dominance in education are less definitive and more nuanced. While 18.2% strongly agree and 50.4% agree (totaling 68.6% agreement) that Russian is predominant, a notable percentage remains neutral (15.2%) or disagrees (16.1%) with this view. This reflects a mixed perception where Russian plays a strong but perhaps not exclusive role. Furthermore, English is perceived as less dominant in the educational process compared to Kazakh and Russian. Only 16.1% strongly agree and 39.7% agree that English predominates, totaling 55.8%. A relatively large proportion (43%) disagree or are neutral, indicating that English is recognized as important but not overwhelmingly dominant.

The concept of Kazakh, Russian and English interacting harmoniously in the English classroom receives substantial support. About 30.7% strongly agree and 44.2% agree that the languages coexist effectively, totaling 74.9% positive responses. However, around 11.2% disagree, suggesting some challenges perceived in multilingual communication in the educational process. Regarding personal use of three languages in their learning, 22.6% of respondents strongly agree and 44.2% agree that they actively employ Kazakh, Russian and English. However, 19.1% show varying degrees of disagreement, indicating that some may rely on fewer languages or face constraints in multilingual interaction in the English classroom.

When asked to provide detailed comments on their answers to the previous questions, respondents explained how they view the actual distribution of languages in their learning process. Thus, many students state that the Kazakh language is dominant and gave reasons for its dominance: "The Kazakh language dominates, as it is understandable to everyone"; "I think that the Kazakh language dominates, as it is the state language and plays a key role in preserving the national culture"; "Today, the Kazakh language predominates in the humanities and classes that meet state standards. If the main teaching materials are presented in Kazakh, then the Kazakh language dominates"; "In the educational process, the main focus is on the Kazakh language, since it is the state language and plays a key role in the formation of national identity".

Other students gave an account of the use of the Russian and English languages in the educational process, which have large significance due to the following reasons: "Russian is widely used in teaching technical and scientific disciplines. English is actively introduced in universities and schools to prepare students for the international environment and modern requirements"; "If the training is related to scientific, technical or professional disciplines, then Russian or English are more often used. The reason for the dominance of the language is the availability of materials, the qualifications of teachers and the needs of the audience"; "During my studies, I consider Kazakh to be the main, native language. But Russian and English are also given a significant place. This is due to the fact that many necessary books, websites, programs are available in Russian and English"; "I believe that the Kazakh language plays a major role, but scientific literature is more often written in Russian"; "In my opinion, English prevails because currently in the field of education and science, English is mainly used, since it is a world language. It occupies an important place in educational systems, and most information comes from foreign sources; "At the moment, English is the dominant language in the educational process, as it is the most popular language and one can say it is used all over the world. That is why they try to focus on English in their studies".

In the second part of the survey, the focus was on how students perceive multilingualism in the educational process. Table 3 summarizes students' attitudes towards multilingualism in the English classroom, revealing key perspectives on language use and mixing in educational settings.

TABLE 3  
STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TO MULTILINGUALISM IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Question	Response	Frequency
8. I believe that in the educational environment it is important for a student to be multilingual.	I strongly agree.	226 (50.7%)
	I agree.	180 (40.4%)
	I neither agree nor disagree.	21 (4.7%)
	I disagree.	16 (3.6%)
	I strongly disagree.	3 (0.7%)
9. I am convinced that it is natural for a multilingual person to mix languages in an educational context.	I strongly agree.	147 (33%)
	I agree.	207 (46.4%)
	I neither agree nor disagree.	57 (12.8%)
	I disagree.	30 (6.7%)
	I strongly disagree.	5 (1.1%)
10. I believe that a multilingual student should strive to use only one language in a given situation.	I strongly agree.	72 (16.1%)
	I agree.	124 (27.8%)
	I neither agree nor disagree.	106 (23.8%)
	I disagree.	131 (29.4%)
	I strongly disagree.	13 (2.9%)
11. I believe that a multilingual student strives to use different languages in the same situation.	I strongly agree.	92 (20.6%)
	I agree.	188 (42.2%)
	I neither agree nor disagree.	105 (23.5%)
	I disagree.	49 (11%)
	I strongly disagree.	12 (2.7%)
12. I like it when students speak only one language in class.	I strongly agree.	99 (22.2%)
	I agree.	175 (39.2%)
	I neither agree nor disagree.	79 (17.7%)
	I disagree.	89 (20%)
	I strongly disagree.	4 (0.9%)
13. I like it when students use all three languages simultaneously in the educational process.	I strongly agree.	110 (24.7%)
	I agree.	190 (42.6%)
	I neither agree nor disagree.	66 (14.8%)
	I disagree.	67 (15%)
	I strongly disagree.	13 (2.9%)

Table 3 shows that a strong majority of students recognize the value of multilingualism in the educational environment. Specifically, 50.7% of respondents strongly agree and 40.4% agree that being multilingual is important for students, totaling over 91% in agreement. Only a small fraction (4.3%) express disagreement or neutrality, indicating widespread appreciation for multilingual competence. Students largely view language mixing as a natural part of multilingual communication in their educational contexts. 33% strongly agree and 46.4% agree with this notion, together accounting for nearly 80% of positive judgement, whereas only a minority (7.8%) express disagreement. This suggests that code-switching is normalized and accepted by most students.

Attitudes are more divided concerning the idea that a multilingual student should use only one language at a time. Only 16.1% strongly agree and 27.8% agree (44% combined) with this viewpoint, whereas a larger portion (32.3%) disagrees and 23.8% remain neutral. This reflects mixed feelings about strict language separation versus flexible use. Similarly, opinions vary on whether multilingual students should tend to use several languages in the same context. 20.6% strongly agree and 42.2% agree (62.8% combined) that multilingualism should be present in the educational process, while 13.7% disagree and 23.5% are neutral.

Regarding preference for monolingual speech in the classroom, the responses show ambivalence. While 22.2% strongly agree and 39.2% agree (61.4% combined) that they like it when students speak only one language, a substantial minority (20.9% combined) are against this and 17.7% are undecided. This suggests that while monolingual use is favored by many, it is not overwhelmingly preferred. When it comes to using all three languages simultaneously in class, 24.7% strongly agree and 42.6% agree (67.3% combined) that they like this multilingual practice. However, 17.9% disagree and 14.8% are neutral, indicating some mixed feelings but generally positive attitudes toward integrated use of multiple languages.

The students' detailed answers to the last question reflect different positions regarding the use of multilingualism in the educational process. Thus, some students express their rejection of multilingualism, since, in their opinion, the simultaneous use of three languages can interfere with the assimilation of the material and create additional difficulties: "Using different languages at the same time interferes with understanding the educational material"; "Using several languages at the same time in teaching can cause confusion and reduce concentration, but if properly organized, it helps develop flexibility of thinking and language skills"; "This can create difficulties in learning and make it difficult to assimilate the material, especially if students do not have a good command of all three languages"; "Using one language in teaching makes the process more understandable and structured. Constantly switching between three languages can cause confusion and make it difficult to assimilate the material".

On the other hand, respondents emphasize the need to study Russian and English to develop intercultural competence: "In my opinion, the Kazakh language dominates the educational process as the state language, while Russian and English complement it, playing an important role in various fields of knowledge and international communication"; "In my opinion, multilingual students, having several languages, naturally use them depending on the situation. This

facilitates their communication and helps them be effective in various cultural contexts”; “The use of all three languages by the teacher makes the material more accessible to students with different language backgrounds. This helps to better understand complex topics, especially when there is a need to translate terms or explain complex concepts. This approach contributes to the formation of multilingual competence and broadens horizons”; “I like the use of three languages, because it helps to better understand the material, develops thinking and prepares for life in a multilingual environment”.

Some survey responses emphasize multilingualism’s value in education for enhancing cognitive flexibility, cultural awareness and global communication. Using Kazakh, Russian and English enriches access to knowledge and fosters multitasking skills, supporting students’ national identity and global competitiveness by connecting them to diverse academic and professional opportunities: “This is truly valuable because using three languages simultaneously develops flexibility of thinking, helps to better understand culture and interact effectively in a global environment. This approach makes education more diverse and modern”; “Using three languages in teaching gives students access to more sources of information and helps to develop flexibility of thinking. For example, the Kazakh language strengthens national identity, Russian provides access to literature and knowledge, and English opens the door to world science and technology”; “Using all three languages in the educational process helps students develop multitasking skills, improve communication and have access to world knowledge, while maintaining national identity”; “Trilingualism allows access to a wider range of knowledge: the Kazakh language strengthens the connection with national culture, Russian opens access to extensive scientific and literary resources, and English ensures integration into the international scientific and professional community. This approach helps students become competitive and successful both nationally and globally”.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

In relation to the findings of our study, we find it necessary to discuss the following issues. A similar investigation into students’ language practices, highlighting alternation between Kazakh, Russian and English as natural communication strategies, was performed by Kurmanova et al. (2023). The main difference is that their study focused on students’ spontaneous conversations beyond the classroom, in an unofficial setting. This difference in situations results in significant differences in the findings obtained. Thus, in students’ spontaneous informal conversations, Kazakh typically serves as the matrix language, with elements of Russian and English incorporated into it. However, in our analysis of group discussions during English classes, English functions as the matrix language, with insertions from Russian and Kazakh included.

The next significant difference concerns the functions of language alternation in students’ conversations. Kurmanova et al. (2023) identified referential, expressive functions as well as structural roles such structural parallelism and grammatical fusion. In our research corpus of students’ formal interactions, the main functions are referential and discourse maker. We, similarly, identified some instances of grammatical fusion in students’ group discussions, but they show less diversity in word patterning. Unlike three types of grammatical fusion identified by Kurmanova et al. (2023), all instances of grammatical fusion in our corpus follow the same pattern, being based on Russian/Kazakh alterations where Kazakh acts as a structural “frame” for Russian-language borrowings. Still, this finding is in contrast with the claim made by Zharkynbekova and Chernyavskaya (2022) that the main pattern of bilingual practices in Kazakhstan is based on the combination of Kazakh roots and Russian affixes, where Russian serves a structural “frame”.

The presence of grammatical fusion in our corpus can be related to the concept of intra-word code-switching, when multilingual speakers switch between morphemes from different languages in the same word (Sabty et al., 2021). Despite being rejected by some scholars (Poplack, 1980; MacSwan & Colina, 2014), intra-word code-switching has been documented in recent research into a number of language pairs including English/Norwegian (Alexiadou et al., 2015), Greek/German (Alexiadou, 2017), English/Russian (Gritsenko & Laletina, 2016; Gritsenko & Aleshinskaya, 2023), English/Kazakh, Russian/Kazakh (Kurmanova et al., 2023) and Kazakh/Russian (Zharkynbekova & Chernyavskaya, 2022). Based on these findings, it is evident that morphological elements can be systematically combined within a single word, similar to how code-switching occurs at the sentence or discourse level (Stefanich et al., 2019).

This type of word formation can also be related to the concept of translanguaging, which highlights the dynamic and creative use of multilingual resources within social and cognitive contexts (Li, 2016, 2018). Unlike code-switching or code-mixing research, which typically examines how syntactic and morphological features are utilized in language mixing (Dahmen, 2022), studies of translanguaging practices focus on the functional and pragmatic dimensions of the language blending process (Munirah et al., 2021). Translanguaging practices serve as a flexible tool for fostering mutual understanding and facilitating harmonious communication in students’ multilingual interactions.

Finally, the findings from actual students’ formal discussions in the English classroom may suggest the development of uneven multilingualism (Ringe, 2022) or linguistic inequality (Nhongo & Siziba, 2022), when one language predominates in communication and the other two are given less attention. In a country whose main languages are traditionally Kazakh and Russian (Zharkynbekova & Chernyavskaya, 2022), English is only starting to gain significance due to the governmental support. The state language policy intersects with the widely acknowledged role of the English language as a symbol of professionalism (Aleshinskaya, 2020), global connection (Utegenova et al., 2024; Abdullina et al., 2022) and a gateway to global educational integration (Vasilieva & Aleshinskaya, 2024). This can be

also evidenced by some responses in our survey highlighting the growing importance of the English language for global integration.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study aimed at exploring forms of multilingualism in a formal classroom context, highlighting the relevant use of these languages and forms of multilingualism. The findings of the qualitative and quantitative analyses of students' multilingual discussions in the English classroom highlight a dynamic and integrated use of English, Russian and Kazakh, with English predominating alongside significant contributions from Russian and Kazakh. The study indicates that Kazakhstan's students engage in rich multilingual practices that encompass three languages as well as various forms of code-switching (intra-sentential, extra-sentential, intra-word) for a variety of purposes (reference, discourse marker, structural), shaped by educational contexts and broader sociolinguistic realities. The findings of the survey point at harmonious interaction among the three languages and confirm frequent multilingual use, highlighting the dynamic and integrated nature of language use in the educational environment of modern Kazakhstan. While there is some division on whether students should stick to one language per situation, the tendency to use multiple languages is acknowledged and often appreciated. These findings emphasize the fluid multilingual competence of students, enabling flexible and contextually adapted communication. The study contributes empirical insights essential for language policy, pedagogy and sociolinguistic theory in multilingual post-Soviet contexts.

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