

B.A.Zhetpisbayeva, T.Yu.Shelestova

*Ye.A.Buketov Karaganda State University
(E-mail: zhetpisbayeva@mail.ru)*

**Early English language teaching as a problem of pedagogical science
and practice of education in Kazakhstan**

Early foreign language teaching is a widely discussed phenomenon. Its importance increases in the Kazakhstan context and with the ideas of multiculturalism and multilingualism. Despite many positive sides to standardizing early English language teaching in Kazakhstan many problems still remain to be tackled. The aim of the article is to give an account of the importance, evaluation and the development perspective of early English language teaching in Kazakhstan. The article investigates the current state of early language teaching and introduces possible changes to improve the quality of primary English language teaching in Kazakhstan.

Key words: early foreign language teaching, young learners, primary education, English language teaching, foreign language learning.

In the message of President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbaev to the people of Kazakhstan «Strategy «Kazakhstan – 2050, New political course of the established state» one of the priority is the role of education in the development of Kazakhstan society [1].

It is undeniable that during the past decades English has been playing an increasingly crucial role in all spheres of life for people around the world. Globalisation has made English a pivotal factor for the development of all countries in terms of economy, information technology, politics, education and cultures [2]. As a result, most countries have realised that the English communicative competence of their citizens must be urgently developed and English pedagogy in all schools must be improved to meet this goal. In many countries, in addition to their own languages, English is used as a second language (ESL). It is used as the medium for teaching and learning in schools, and for official purposes in government and business sections. In many other countries, English is neither a home language nor official language, but rather is taught and learned in schools as a foreign language to prepare students to communicate with foreigners, for example in Kazakhstan English language is international language for communication. In these cases it is known as EFL, English as a Foreign Language. Recently, these countries have extended the time for learning English, and English language teaching has started at the lower levels in primary schools.

The reasons for teaching English to younger children vary. It is believed that young children are more likely to adapt to sound systems and acquire phonological patterns of a new language than adults [3]. Additionally, there has been a call for early commencement of English teaching and learning because of the public disappointment with the poor English learning outcomes of students at secondary and tertiary levels. In some countries, English has been introduced to young students as early as grade 3, for example, Taiwan (in 2005), South Korea (in 1997), and Vietnam (in 1996) [4], while in other countries such as Indonesia, children start learning English from grade 4 [5]. However, the successful implementation of English teaching and learning at lower school levels in these countries is challenging, particularly in terms of teaching methods, teachers' proficiency and the facilitation of teaching and learning improvements.

In keeping with international trends, Kazakhstan, where people learn and use English as a foreign language (EFL) and which has mandated teaching and learning English in schools for more than a hundred years, has realised the increasing importance of the English language. Thus, English teaching and learning

has recently been developed and expanded to include a wider range of people including younger children. It may be useful to recount some of the developments over the last century or so in relation to English teaching and learning in Kazakhstan.

According to Education Development State Program of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011–2020 primary foreign-language education is the first stage of new 12-year school. Therefore, there was an essential necessity for working out theoretical and linguo-didactic support of the process of early foreign languages teaching [6].

In the second half of the last century there was much debate as to the benefits of an early start in foreign language education (hereafter FLE). Opinion tended to polarise with detractors arguing that it can actually damage foreign language development and supporters claiming that it can considerably enhance subsequent foreign language learning. Developmental psychology, which emphasises the emotional disposition and intellectual readiness of young children to learn a foreign language [7] and neuro-physiology with its critical period hypothesis and the concept of early brain plasticity [8] were both used to endorse the claims of early language learning but there were also strong counter-arguments, particularly the claim that the more highly developed learning strategies of older learners can compensate for early plasticity [9]. The research into second language acquisition has continued over the last decades, producing variations on the «critical period» theme, as in the «sensitive period» theory, the «tuning in» hypothesis and the «natural sieve» hypothesis, but there still appears to be no conclusive evidence either way. There are in fact so many variables at play and, as Johnstone (1994) points out, age is only one of many determinants of the ultimate proficiency attained in a second or foreign language.

However, there is now general consensus that while a more receptive disposition is only an enabling factor and an early start is neither strictly necessary nor a sufficient condition for the attainment of proficiency in another language, if the right educational environment is produced an early start can be extremely beneficial and facilitate the introduction of a second foreign language at a later stage. Above all, an early start to foreign languages is seen to positively impact on the child's overall language and educational development and in particular to help engender a positive attitude towards other cultures. It is this educational and pedagogical argument which underpins the primary foreign language policy in Kazakhstan.

Early foreign language education has become a priority issue on the agenda of Kazakhstan government with central government agencies and ministries committed to promoting it nationwide. Commitment to multilingualism, the attention to the development of intercultural competences and their contribution towards building Kazakhstan citizenship, as well as the insistence on life-learning as an essential concept in Kazakhstan's new educational policy, have made early language learning a focal point in Kazakhstan programmes and actions.

At the beginning of the 2010s, following the primary school reform, the government set about the ambitious task of introducing foreign languages as a compulsory subject in as many primary classes as possible. The intention was to entrust the teaching to primary teachers already in possession of the necessary competences but shortage of staff thwarted the original intention to start the teaching from the age of 7 to the age of 8, and the idea to embed the language in the curriculum was also difficult to put into practice for the same reason that there were simply not enough class teachers with sufficient language competence. Once again it soon became quite evident that unless the vital problem of teacher training was addressed comprehensively and incisively all plans to generalize primary FLT would be doomed to failure.

Prior to 2004 English has not been a compulsory course in primary schools although some teaching of English has taken place at this level. This has been on a very modest scale although on an increasingly larger scale mostly in urban key schools.

Nevertheless, the teaching of English at this level had not been standardized, due to its unrecognized position in the school curriculum, limited availability of qualified teachers and lack of appropriate teaching materials. The starting age varied from age 8 to age 11 and the weekly time allocation ranged from 1 period to 2 periods depending on the availability of the teachers. The approach to teaching was more often a mixture of the structural and functional, with situational dialogues being the main form of texts along with a strong emphasis on learning IPA to ensure correct pronunciation and intonation at the initial stage.

Most textbooks used for primary schools were produced locally including a few licensed foreign textbooks, such as Brilliant (for Kazakhstan), Round-up (starter). Some schools simply used secondary school English textbooks for the primary level. The transition or continuity from the primary to the secondary has long been a problem but never seriously tackled as there has been very little research conducted on foreign language teaching at the primary level in Kazakhstan.

Since the start of 2004, the government has become increasingly concerned with the upgrading the level of English of all Kazakhstan citizens. It was decided in early 2004 that English would be offered, as an experiment, at primary level from September of that year, starting in cities and then gradually towns and villages. The Basic Requirement for Primary School English was designed and issued at the same time by the Ministry of Education. The Basic Requirement makes it clear that the beginning age is grade 3 (age 8) and the time allocation recommended is 1 time a week, with a minimum of 45 minutes, based on the principle of shorter periods and higher frequency.

The Basic Requirement for Primary School English postulates that the main aims of primary English include:

- to develop pupils' interests, self confidence and positive attitude towards learning English;
- to cultivate the pupils' language sense and enable good pronunciation and intonation;
- to develop the pupils' preliminary ability to use English in daily exchanges and lay a good basis for further study.

Although the Basic Requirement does not enforce any specific method for teaching, the performance descriptors designate a change in methodology. They clearly reflect an activity-based approach, encouraging teaching and learning through listening, speaking, singing, playing, doing, acting, viewing, reading and writing to provide children opportunities to experience the language and facilitate their own discovery of meaning as a first-hand experience. Children are required to do things with English, and the learning process is expected to be a playful and happy experience.

It is also stated in the Basic Requirement that the assessment for primary school English needs to meet with the purposes of enhancing students' overall development and teachers' effectiveness in teaching. Formative assessment is expected to be used as the major method of assessing students' achievement in English. Variety in forms of assessment and opportunities for pupils to choose from the different forms according to their own strength and interests should be the characteristics of the new assessment system for primary schools.

Introducing English into primary schools is not a temporary policy. It is rather a long-term goal and an enterprise to enhance the cultural and educational quality of all the citizens and promote quality-oriented education. To ensure success in primary school English teaching, the Ministry of Education has encouraged the use of satellite TV for both English teachers and school children. A separate channel on satellite TV is used to broadcast primary school English teacher training sessions and actual English lessons for use in classrooms where needed. All textbooks for use in the primary school will have to be reviewed by the national textbook review committee under the Ministry of Education. Most of them are joint-venture productions between a Kazakhstan publisher and a foreign publisher. The government does not welcome complete imports of foreign textbooks but cooperation in textbook writing and production is encouraged, as textbooks by foreign publishers have to be localized to meet the needs of the Basic Requirements and the needs of children in the Kazakhstan contexts. In order to ensure success, the Ministry of Education emphasizes that research in primary school English teaching is to be strengthened and supported. It requires that full time ELT advisors on primary school English teaching be recruited into local educational departments to take responsibility for guiding teaching and research in the area. Demonstration schools and regions are encouraged to carry out experiments and reforms so as to lead the whole area for teaching and research. To protect other foreign languages taught in schools, special support will be given to keep the present number of schools teaching Russian and Kazakh or other foreign languages within the same areas.

The Ministry of Education expects that educational departments at all levels be energetic and committed to taking effective measures to train primary school English teachers. Both pre-service and in-service courses are being developed to prepare and train primary school English teachers. The Ministry of Education requires each province to work out their strategic plans for implementing primary school English teaching in terms of timeframe, scale of teaching and teacher training.

With the government decision to introduce primary English in Kazakhstan and with the issuing of the Basic Requirement for Primary School English, English teaching in the primary school will move gradually from the current 'chaotic' situation towards standardization in terms of its teaching objectives, the beginning age and time allocations. As far as teaching methods and assessment are concerned, the Basic Requirement provides some guidelines for teaching and assessment. Textbooks are also going to be geared more towards children's needs and the level of their cognitive development as the government will make sure that only those textbooks that meet the Basic Requirement and the Kazakhstan context will be recommended. Assess-

ment will enter a new phase of development to better reflect the nature of primary school foreign language teaching.

Despite many positive sides to standardizing primary school English teaching in Kazakhstan, many problems still remain to be tackled. The first and foremost is the training of enough qualified teachers.

With the introduction of primary English, a new college degree for training primary school English teachers is to be introduced and programmes are being designed for training future primary English teachers. At the same time, many of the existing teachers need to go through in-service training as many of them will face the situation of working with lower age groups and they need to acquire new skills and techniques to work with younger learners. Also, the teaching aims and objectives postulated in the Basic Requirement expect primary school teachers to change in many aspects. First, they are expected to change their views about language teaching from a knowledge-based one to an ability-based one. Second, they are expected to change their role from that of a knowledge transmitter to a multi-role educator aiming for the whole child development. Thirdly, teachers are expected to use a more activity-based approach and make the students the center of learning. Fourthly, teachers are expected to change their way of assessing pupils' achievement in learning the language. They need to use formative assessment in addition to using tests, which they are already very familiar with. Last but not the least, teachers are expected to use modern technology in teaching, creating more effective resources for learning and for using the language. In addition to all of these, the teachers' own language proficiency need to be improved, without which other roles can hardly be fulfilled.

For any educational change, teachers are the crucial factors as they are the implementers of the new ideas. Their contributions to and participation in the innovation are essential. Without their willingness, understanding, cooperation and participation, there can be no changes [10, 11]. However, teachers have to accommodate new beliefs and see themselves in new roles and this can be very demanding [12]. Furthermore, one's belief systems can not be changed overnight. The change required of teachers can only be supported through involving them in their professional doings and reflection, as Fullan [13] points out that '(it) is what people develop in their minds and actions that counts. People do not learn or accomplish complex changes by being told or shown what to do. A deeper meaning and solid change must be born over time». We need to be fully aware of the fact that conceptual change is a difficult and lengthy process [14] and the new beliefs or ideas will have to be gradually incorporated into the teachers' own belief structures through continuous practice and reflections so that adjustments can be made in their own thinking [15].

English language teaching in Kazakhstan has entered a new era with the introduction of primary English. There is an obvious shift of paradigm from the structural audio-lingual approach to a global approach to language education through activity-based learning in the primary school. Increasing numbers of teachers, teacher educators and researchers are now beginning to devote themselves to the study of language teaching with young learners. New textbooks are being developed and teacher training programmes at primary and secondary levels are being funded by both the national and local governments. Many teachers are beginning to realize the need to change their beliefs about language and language learning, and the need to acquire new skills and techniques in teaching and in assessment according to the new concepts in teaching and learning and according to the needs of their students. Research into primary school English teaching and teacher training are urgently needed to ensure a better understanding so as to better inform and improve practice.

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Б.А.Жетпісбаева, Т.Ю.Шелестова

Қазақстанда ағылшын тілін ерте жастан оқыту қазіргі педагогикалық ғылым мен білім беру тәжірибесінің мәселесі ретінде

Қазіргі таңда шет тілдерін ерте жастан оқыту — кең талқыланатын тақырыптардың бірі. Көптілді білім беру идеяларының мәнмәтінінде ағылшын тілін ерте жастан оқытудың маңыздылығы Қазақстанда күннен күнге артуда. Шет тілдерін ерте оқыту саласындағы көптеген жағымды үдерістерге қарамастан, әлі де шешілмеген көп мәселе бар. Мақалада Қазақстанда ерте жастан ағылшын тілін оқытудың болашағы талданып, оған баға берілді және ерте жастан оқытудың қазіргі кездегі жай-күйі мен қазақстандық мектептерінде ағылшын тілін оқыту сапасын арттырудың ықтимал жолдары қарастырылды.

Б.А.Жетписбаева, Т.Ю.Шелестова

Раннее обучение английскому языку как проблема современной педагогической науки и практики образования в Казахстане

В статье отмечено, что на сегодняшний день раннее обучение иностранным языкам — широко обсуждаемая тема. В контексте идей полиязычного образования авторами показана возрастающая с каждым днем важность раннего обучения английскому языку в Казахстане. Подчеркнуто, что, несмотря на положительные процессы в области раннего обучения иностранным языкам, многие проблемы все еще остаются нерешенными. В данной статье даны анализ и оценка перспективы развития раннего обучения английскому языку в Казахстане. Рассматриваются текущее состояние раннего обучения и потенциальные пути улучшения качества преподавания английского языка в школах Казахстана.

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Ye.V.Bodrova, I.A.Bobykina

Chelyabinsk State University (E-mail: bobykina-ia@mail.ru)

Early learning a foreign language — the first stage of continuous language self-education

The article describes the early teaching of English. The authors suppose that younger school age is the most sensitive period for developing a skills of continuous language self-education. Namely these skills allows the person to develop her abilities in the future. However, the key to success is the correct organization of the educational process that considers individual characteristics and interests of the learner.

Key words: early learning, sensitive age, self directed learning, intrinsic motivation, theatrical games.

Educational institution is along with the family the most important institution of socialization of the children. In the stable development period of the society education as a mechanism for relaying knowledge accumulated by mankind viewed the learner as the object of the impact. Modern conditions of integration and transformation of the global community, reducing of reproductive activity, widespread dissemination of innovative creative processes led to changes in the system of language education. Firstly, the learner becomes the subject of an educational process which is built on the basis of his personal way. Secondly, along with the social significance a foreign language is also a personal need. It is becoming ever more important to be able to successfully interact with people with other cultures and languages. Accordingly, foreign language learning starts early not to miss and use advantage of the sensitive period of younger school age. The psychological studies and experiments have confirmed that.

The main aim of early teaching is to learn gradually how to learn a foreign language, i.e., becoming an effective language and culture learner, because these skills acquired at an early age are fixed for life and provide a solid basis for continuous language self-education. It is the self-managed process of actively assign a new social experience during the foreign language learning [1]. The strategies of self directed learning are the great tools for understanding what methods and techniques are effective personality. And once the learner knows how to learn he is ready to teach himself anything.

Clearly, one of the main objectives of early learning foreign language is the development of an intercultural communicative competence. According to D. Hymes learning is a process of personal knowledge construction and meaning-making. It is both a cognitive (intra-individual) and a socioculturally (inter-individual) constructive process. As a cognitive constructive process, learning involves reorganising and restructuring, as well as interpreting information. It involves the individual making sense of new knowledge by mapping it onto his/her existing framework of knowledge, thereby restructuring the individual's conceptual map. As a socioculturally constructive process, learning is socially situated and mediated towards the construction of knowledge, in social action, within its cultural, historical, and institutional setting. Through interaction, individuals develop a framework for interpreting experience, congruent with the cultural system. Within this view of learning, teaching and learning are simultaneously linguistic and sociocultural acts [2]. Involving learners in linguistic and sociocultural acts can be successfully by using of game technologies. Game allows the learner first emotionally and then intellectually mastere the whole system of human relations. They are a complex effect on his/her intellectual, emotional, volitional, communicative and others qualities.