



Evaluating Language Competencies of Kazakhstan's Civil Servants: A Data-Driven Analysis and Development Model

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyze the current state of language competencies among Kazakhstan's civil servants and to develop a model for enhancing these skills. Based on survey data from Kazakhstani civil servants, the authors assess Kazakh, Russian, and English proficiency. The results show that socio-demographic factors account for only a small portion of the variation of language proficiency levels. Language competencies are positively, though weakly, correlated with civil servants' educational attainment. Based on an analysis of Kazakhstan's language policy and the training and retraining programs for civil servants, the authors propose a model for developing language competencies. The proposed model offers a valuable framework for enhancing education and training programs for civil servants in countries facing similar challenges. This contribution adds to the broader discourse on professional development in the public sector, highlighting the critical role of targeted education in strengthening governance and public administration effectiveness.

KEYWORDS

Kazakhstan; education; public servants; state language; language competence.

INTRODUCTION

Public administration's linguistic competency in multilingual nations directly affects governmental efficiency and civic engagement. This issue is particularly relevant for the governments of post-Soviet republics, where questions of national identity are often viewed through the lens of language (Hasanova, 2022; Luscombe & Kazdal, 2014). An emerging research area focuses on public administration within the context of multiculturalism in European countries, and this approach allows for conclusions to be drawn on various issues, such as the impact of diversity and dissimilarity on public servants' job commitment (Ritz & Alfes, 2018), challenges related to the use of specialized terminology (Ongaro & Van Thiel, 2018), and disparities in service provision to different ethnic groups (Vacca, 2013). The issue at hand reflects a broader challenge that resonates in countries like Canada or Switzerland, where multilingualism is integral to national cohesion. Kazakhstan's unique lingual framework, shaped by its Soviet legacy and contemporary global pressures, is the result of a conscious approach that can serve as a study for nations navigating similar linguistic landscapes.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, adopted in a republican referendum on August 30, 1995, the Russian language is officially used alongside Kazakh in state organizations and local government bodies. Despite Kazakh being the official language, Russian predominates in most regions of Kazakhstan in both official business correspondence and everyday communication among citizens. This widespread use of Russian stems from Kazakhstan's history as part of the Soviet Union, where Russian was the dominant administrative, educational, and interethnic communication language. Even after independence, Russian retained its strong presence due to historical institutional frameworks and the continued bilingualism of the population (Zhumanova et al., 2016). Additionally, the Constitution mandates the state to create conditions for the study and development of the various languages spoken by Kazakhstan's diverse ethnic groups (Const. of the Republic of Kazakhstan, art.7).

The 2021 national census reveals that Kazakhstan is home to representatives of over 100 distinct ethnic communities, with Kazakhs comprising the majority (70.4%) and Russians accounting for 15.5% (Bureau of National Statistics, 2021). While Russian is taught as a foreign language according to educational policy, it serves as a language of interethnic communication (Djuraeva, 2021). The linguistic landscape of Kazakhstan is unique, encompassing several language competency schemes, including Kazakh-Russian bilingualism, ethnic-Kazakh bilingualism, ethnic-Russian-Kazakh trilingualism, and Kazakh-Russian-English trilingualism. Predominantly, Kazakh-Russian bilingualism is widespread among Kazakhs and to a lesser extent among other ethnic groups. English, recognized as a lingua franca and an alternative to Russian for interethnic communication, was highlighted by former President N. Nazarbayev in 2006 as essential for the younger generation alongside Kazakh and Russian (Tussupbekova et al., 2018).

One of the most successful initiatives for promoting Kazakh-Russian-English trilingual is the establishment of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools. Higher education programs also support

the development of language competencies. However, despite significant progress, the effectiveness of language reforms is often hindered by traditionalism and entrenched value orientations within Kazakhstan's educational system (Agbo & Pak, 2017).

These circumstances significantly influence the development of Kazakh as the state language. While over 90% of ethnic Kazakhs have proficiency in Kazakh, proficiency among other ethnicities is considerably lower; for instance, only 25% of Russians in Kazakhstan speak Kazakh (Bureau of National Statistics, 2021). Moreover, in practice, the recorded rate of Kazakh language proficiency could be obscuring its actual use, given the substantial regional disparities in Kazakh language proficiency. Levels of proficiency also vary; conventionally, Kazakhstan categorizes Kazakh speakers into three groups based on proficiency levels: elite (high proficiency in all styles of use, both oral and written), average (proficiency in conversational and some literary styles), and elementary (limited to conversational ability). It has been found that 30% of Kazakh speakers are at the elementary level, 61-62% at the average level, and 8-9% at the elite level (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019).

Given this context, the development of the Kazakh language as the state language remains a critical issue in Kazakhstan's internal policy. Recent government policies have become more citizen-centric, emphasizing the competencies civil servants need to effectively communicate with the public, regardless of their rank. Disparities in language proficiency, including Kazakh, can hinder effective communication between the government and citizens, thus impeding political objectives.

Although civil servants are formally tested for Kazakh language proficiency upon employment, these tests do not influence the outcome of their recruitment. Civil servants in Kazakhstan are required to possess a set of competencies tailored to their specific positions, with basic competencies mandatory for all administrative levels. However, there is no formal requirement for language competence.

The purpose of this article is to develop a model for enhancing the language competencies of civil servants in Kazakhstan. To achieve this, the authors address the following research questions:

- (1) How do civil servants in Kazakhstan assess the level of their language competencies?*
- (2) What socio-demographic factors influence the language competencies of civil servants in Kazakhstan?*

This article is the result of a study conducted in 2023 among current civil servants. The survey aimed to examine the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on the level of language proficiency.

Necessity of Language Competencies in The Public Sector

In international literature, terms such as Linguistic Competencies (Makena & Feni, 2023; Niklas et al., 2020; Olayiwola et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2023), Language Competence (Zhou & Lochtman, 2023), and Language Proficiency (Rose et al., 2020) are frequently used. While these terms are

not always clearly defined, they generally refer to the ability and degree of proficiency in a particular language, in either general or specific contexts or populations.

Traditionally, language competencies have been a focus for linguists, but recently, the issue of language proficiency has garnered attention from public administration theorists and practitioners (Karimova et al., 2024; Kuzembayeva et al., 2024; Makena, 2023). The complexity of language issues in the public sector is particularly pronounced in multicultural and multilingual countries. For instance, Murdoch et al. (2022) argue that language can be a significant characteristic of bureaucratic representation in the Economic Community of West African States. A language policy that prioritizes a single state language may have adverse effects. Farukshin (2017) found that in Russia, such policies reduce the functional role of the numerous languages spoken in the Federation's constituent entities. Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka, the Constitution ensures citizens' rights to access government services in two official languages, leading to the introduction of a competency exam for civil servants in 2007 to test their proficiency in a second language. Yet despite this, systemic issues in second language acquisition for government officers persist, as noted by Wickramasinghe (2018), who also highlights the limited effectiveness of financial incentives as motivational tools.

The Canadian experience provides further insights into the challenges of promoting bilingualism. Although financial incentives were introduced in the late 19th century to encourage civil servants to use both English and French, Maltais (2018) found that these incentives did not effectively motivate employees to learn or use a second language. While both languages are official in Canadian federal institutions, promoting equal representation, the implementation of bilingual policies often faces obstacles, primarily the dominance of English due to insufficient structural changes and leadership (Gaspard, 2014).

Language competencies are crucial in the promotion systems of civil servants. Abdul-Kadir (2019) emphasized the importance of localized English proficiency assessments in the Malaysian civil service for career advancement. Ridao (2014) highlighted the requirement for Catalan language proficiency in the Balearic Islands' public administration, deeming it essential for effective functioning. In Catalonia, an influx of immigrants has led to the creation of interpreter positions to ensure equal access to public services, despite the complexity added by multiple Chinese dialects (Vargas-Urpi, 2018). Easlick (2022) examined the language policies in the UK and Finland, noting that languages are viewed as necessary, complementary, or useful depending on the context. Garavelas and Chita (2014) concluded that foreign language proficiency is vital for Greek civil servants for both oral and written communication with the public, fostering multicultural skills. Ly (2018) proposed innovative recommendations for Vietnamese civil servants to enhance their language skills, stressing the importance of student motivation, job-related language competencies, and innovative educational content. Training programs at the National Academy of Public Administration also contribute to improving language competence among Vietnamese public sector employees (Nga et al., 2023). The development of language competencies among civil servants through higher and postgraduate

education programs is common worldwide, and the effectiveness of these programs hinges on students' interest in learning languages for professional purposes and the relevance of the topics covered by instructors (Boiko, 2023).

The assessment of language competencies among civil servants is a well-explored topic in countries where proficiency in specific languages is mandatory for employment in government agencies. Starova et al. (2020) analyzed the language policies in the Baltic countries, highlighting the introduction of systematic language certification for public service employment. The authors emphasized the necessity of state centralization in language policy. In Finland, an officially bilingual country, civil servants' language exams assess speaking, writing, and comprehension skills. The evaluation criteria are "satisfactory," "good," or "excellent," though many civil servants opt to confirm their language competence through higher education certificates (Liukinevičienė & Buivydienė, 2016).

Despite the extensive literature on language competence, there is a research gap regarding the factors influencing language competence among civil servants. This article provides unique data on the language competencies of Kazakhstani civil servants. Multicultural Kazakhstan is characterized by the development of Kazakh-Russian bilingualism at the state level and in various communication spheres (Tuksaitova, 2016). The increasing societal demand to strengthen the role of Kazakh as the state language necessitates adequate political measures.

Legislative Framework and Evaluation of Language Competencies of Public Servants in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's state language policy is grounded in principles of tolerance and motivation without oppression (Orazaliyeva & Orazbayeva, 2015). Article 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan outlines the status of the state language, the Russian language, and other languages of the country's peoples. Kazakh is designated as the official language of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Mandatory knowledge of the state language is legislated for certain senior state officials. Article 41 of the Constitution requires fluency in the state language for the elected President. Similarly, Article 58 mandates language proficiency for the chairpersons of the Chambers of Parliament, elected from among the deputies of the Senate and the Mazhilis. Additionally, Article 93 obliges the government and local bodies to create conditions for the free acquisition of the state language by all citizens.

Practically, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan" regulates social relations related to language use in state and non-state organizations and local governments. De jure, the Law establishes the Kazakh language as the language of legislation, legal proceedings, and public administration (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1997). Alongside Kazakh, Russian is officially used in state organizations and local governments. The Law also encourages the development of other ethnic languages within Kazakhstan, ensuring that citizens' linguistic rights are not infringed. Responses to citizen appeals are given in the state language or the language of the appeal. In practice, government bodies typically respond in the language of the request, in compliance with the Law's provisions.

The selection of candidates for admission to the civil service in Kazakhstan is regulated by the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On the Civil Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan," along with qualification requirements and testing procedures established by the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Civil Service Affairs. According to the Order of the Chairman of the Agency, dated February 21, 2017 (No. 40), one stage of the competitive procedure for administrative public positions involves writing an essay in either the state or Russian language, with the choice left to the candidate. Candidates are also tested on their knowledge of the state language; however, there is no set threshold for passing this test. Additionally, candidates undergo an assessment of personal qualities. The selection process includes an automated assessment of competencies through testing, evaluating 13 essential skills required for effective job performance. These skills include stress resistance, initiative, responsibility, customer focus, integrity, self-development, efficiency, cooperation, activity management, decision-making, leadership, strategic thinking, and change management. The testing also includes questions to determine the applicant's level of reliability. Notably, language competencies of applicants for civil service are not specifically assessed (Chairman of the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Civil Service Affairs, 2017).

To evaluate the Kazakh language proficiency of citizens and foreigners, the KAZTEST system was introduced in 2006 by the National Testing Center. KAZTEST is the Kazakh equivalent of leading international language assessment systems, such as IELTS and TOEFL for English, TÖMER for Turkish, and DSH for German. This system enables specialists in various fields to determine their proficiency level in the state language. KAZTEST is particularly in demand in academic settings, organizations, and institutions where knowledge of the Kazakh language is mandatory. It is required for applicants seeking the Bolashak scholarship, teachers at Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, candidates for the Presidential Youth Personnel Reserve, and applicants to doctoral programs, as well as, in some cases, master's programs. Statistics related to the number of people who passed KAZTEST from 2019 to 2022 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 reveals a decreasing trend in the total number of participants taking the KAZTEST exam, from 38,461 in 2019 to 21,687 in 2022. This decline may be attributed to various factors, such as legislative changes, modifications in the testing process, or shifts in test preparation culture. Notably, in 2020, the number of test-takers dropped significantly to 7,564 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a logical outcome of the widespread disruptions caused by the health crisis. Among civil servants who took the exam, percentages of individuals achieving levels B1 and C1 have varied over the years. For instance, in 2019, a plurality (33%) attained level B1, whereas in 2022, a plurality (41.7%) reached level B2. Since its inception, over 400,000 individuals have participated in the KAZTEST.

Table 1.*Performance and Progress in KAZTEST from 2019 to 2022*

Year	Total count of individuals who passed KAZTEST	Civil Servants
2019	38,461	B1 – 33% C1 – 3.2%
2020	7,564	B1 – 26.4% C1 – 1.5%
2021	18,910	B1 – 14.6% C1 – 1.5%
2022	21,687	B2 – 41.7% C1 – 3.5%

Note: Compiled by the author using annual sociological and analytical studies on language policy matters in the Republic of Kazakhstan

In 2020, a new system, QAZAQ RESMI TEST (www.qrt.kz), was developed to assess proficiency in official business Kazakh. This system targets master's and doctoral students entering the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, applicants for scientific internships abroad through the Bolashak Center for International Programs, teachers of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, and candidates for the Presidential Youth Personnel Reserve.

Language tests, particularly KAZTEST, are built on the principles of comprehensive and objective assessment of all language competencies. Consequently, they are designed to accurately determine the level of language proficiency. However, a reasonable question arises: how are language competencies related to the job performance and productivity of civil servants? Broadly speaking, relying too heavily on language test scores for hiring or promotion can lead to an overemphasis on formal language skills, potentially overlooking other competencies critical for public service effectiveness. It may also create barriers for individuals who excel in other aspects of their job but struggle with formal language testing. While language tests are useful for assessing communication skills, they do not fully capture job performance, especially in roles that require critical thinking, leadership, or technical expertise. Nevertheless, language proficiency, particularly in Kazakhstan, is crucial for effective communication with citizens, especially in rural, Kazakh-speaking areas. Language barriers, where they exist, often lead to communication challenges in the workplace. This is particularly relevant when managing employees with different cultural backgrounds, as noted by Lee and Chon (2000). An important component of effectively managing a multicultural workforce is found in the organization's efforts to ensure harmonious and productive working relationships among demographically diverse staff (Madera et al., 2012).

METHODS

This study, conducted by the authors, employed a quantitative survey-based research design to assess the professional competencies of civil servants in Kazakhstan. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via internal government communication channels between April and May 2023.

Sample / Participants

A total of 10,943 civil servants from all regions of Kazakhstan responded to the survey. Participants represented a diverse workforce, including people of different age groups, genders, and levels of experience in the civil service (Table 2). The study ensured diversity by including respondents from urban and rural areas across the country. A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure that each region and key demographic group within the civil service was adequately represented.

Participants were asked to self-assess their language proficiency by answering the question: "What languages do you speak, please indicate your level of proficiency." Proficiency levels were assessed on a scale from 1 to 6, where: 1 = Beginner, 2 = Lower Intermediate, 3 = Intermediate, 4 = Upper Intermediate, 5 = Advanced, 6 = Proficient. This self-assessment was based on participants' own evaluation of their language abilities and was not linked to a formal language proficiency test, such as TOEFL or IELTS.

In addition to the main question on language proficiency, the questionnaire also included sociodemographic questions on gender, age, number of children, place of residence, and family income. These variables were used to investigate the factors that may influence the self-assessment of language skills.

Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instrument was an online questionnaire that was sent to civil servants through internal communication channels. The questionnaire consisted of four main blocks, including 47 questions. These blocks included:

- Sociodemographic data (e.g., gender, age, education, income, etc.);
- Perception of the civil service;
- Professional competencies of civil servants (the main focus of this article);
- The social status of civil servants.

The main question that the study focused on regarded language competence. Responses were collected on a 6-point Likert scale. The question about language competence was specifically designed to capture self-assessment of the respondents' level of competence in several languages, including Kazakh, Russian, and other languages.

The sociodemographic data allowed for a more in-depth analysis to examine which factors may influence the self-assessment of language skills, as well as to build regression and correlation models for further analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using statistical methods to examine the relationship between sociodemographic factors and language proficiency. Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize the data. Multiple linear regression was used to analyze how factors, such as income, area of living, age, level of educational degree and number of children, influence self-assessment of language proficiency.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, the data collection instrument was developed based on an analysis of previous similar studies and consultations with experts in the field of civil service. The questions were refined to adequately reflect key aspects of language proficiency and sociodemographic factors. Before the full rollout of the questionnaire, a pre-test was conducted with a smaller sample, which allowed for additional changes and refinements to the questions.

To ensure reliability, the internal consistency of the language proficiency scale was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which showed satisfactory reliability ($\alpha > 0.80$), confirming the stability and consistency of the scale across responses.

Ethical considerations

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided informed consent before participating. Confidentiality was maintained and all responses were anonymized to protect the participants' personal data.

Administration of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was sent to participants electronically through official government emails, ensuring access only for government employees. The questionnaire was available online, making it convenient for respondents to complete. Data collection took place from March to May 2023, and regular reminders were sent to ensure a high response rate.

Table 2 (see appendix)

RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

According to the survey, over one-third of respondents (35.3%) rated their proficiency in the Kazakh language as 'proficient'. The second-largest group (23.9%) identified their proficiency level as 'intermediate'. The distribution of respondents across other proficiency levels was as follows: "upper-intermediate" (12.2%), 'advanced' (11.7%), and 'elementary' (10.2%). The smallest proportion of respondents reported a 'sub-intermediate' level of Kazakh proficiency (6.7%). These results indicate that more than half of the civil servants claim to possess an upper-intermediate proficiency in the Kazakh language. However, there remains a significant number of government employees reporting sub-intermediate language competence.

Proficiency in the Russian language at a professional level was reported by the majority of respondents (26.3%). Similarly, a substantial portion of civil servants (26.0%) indicated an 'intermediate' level of proficiency. The percentages of respondents at the 'advanced' and 'upper-intermediate' levels were 19.9% and 18.3%, respectively. The least proficient categories

included those with 'sub-intermediate' (6.3%) and "elementary" (4.3%) levels of Russian proficiency.

As anticipated, the highest percentage of civil servants reported their English proficiency at the 'elementary' level (58.1%). Those with 'sub-intermediate' knowledge constituted 21.1% of respondents. Smaller percentages were observed for 'intermediate' (14.7%), 'upper-intermediate' (3.5%), 'advanced' (1.7%), and 'proficient' (1.0%) levels of English proficiency (see Figures 1-3).

Figure 1.

Distribution of Respondents' Proficiency Levels in the Kazakh Language

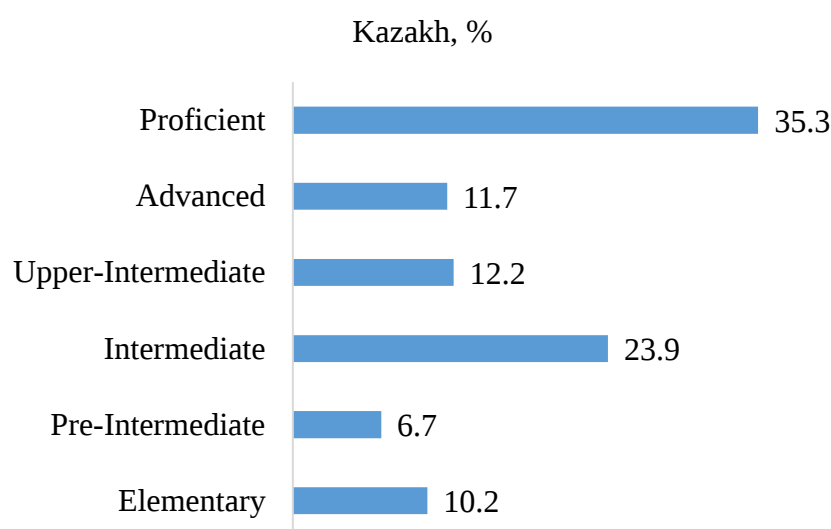


Figure 2.

Distribution of Respondents' Proficiency Levels in the Russian Language

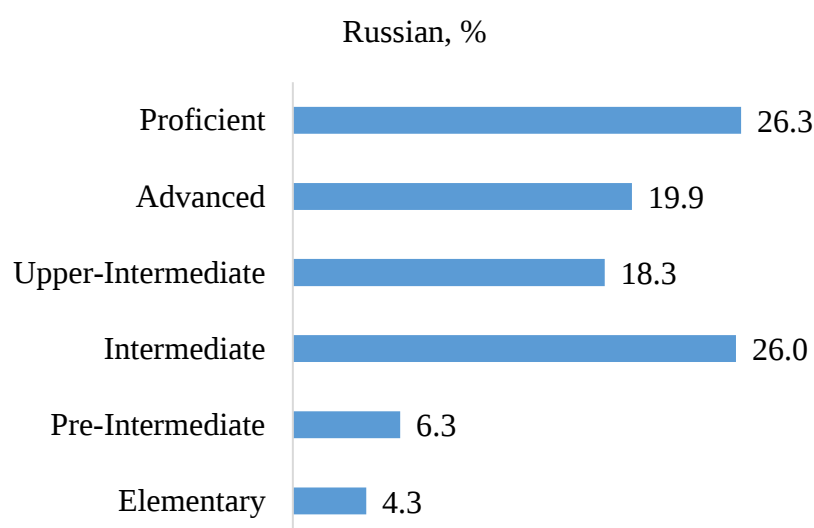
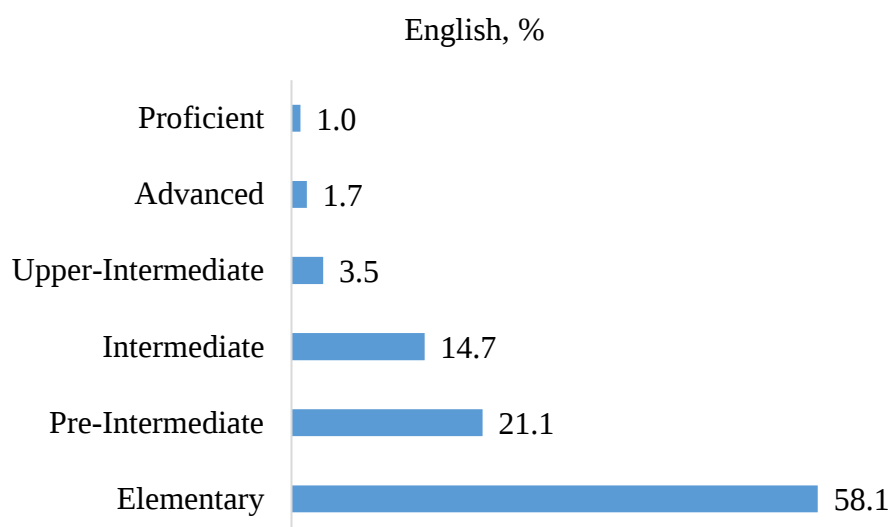


Figure 3.*Distribution of Respondents' Proficiency Levels in the English Language*

Tables 3, 4, and 5 present regression outcomes for each language proficiency (Kazakh, Russian, and English). The independent variables include level of education (Education), number of children in the household (Children), region of residence (Area), income level (Income), and academic degree (Degree).

Table 3.*Regression Results for Kazakh Language Proficiency*

Variable	Regression Coef.	Std. err.	t	p-value
Children	0.092***	0.011	8.27	< .001
Area	0.068***	0.013	5.07	< .001
Income	0.006	0.014	0.44	0.660
Degree	0.199***	0.055	3.65	< .001
_cons	2.656	0.285	9.31	< .001

 $n = 10,942$ $R^2 = 0.010$

Adj. R-squared = 0.009

 $F = 27.03$ (significance < .001)

Note: ** significant at 0.05, *** significant at 0.01

In the regression analysis, as shown in Table 3, the adjusted R-squared is 0.009. This suggests that only 0.9% of the variance in Kazakh language proficiency levels among respondents is accounted for by the included socio-demographic factors. Notably, the regression coefficients for the independent variables Children (0.092), Area (0.068), and Degree (0.199) are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), while the coefficient for Income (0.006, $p = 0.660$) is deemed insignificant (Hinkle et al., 2003). All significant independent variables exhibit a positive association with the dependent variable, with the highest coefficient observed for Degree (0.199). This implies that individuals with higher education levels are more proficient in Kazakh. The model's F-statistic (27.03, $p < 0.001$) indicates that the regression is statistically

significant overall, though the low explanatory power suggests that additional factors influence Kazakh language proficiency.

Table 4.

Regression Results for Russian Language Proficiency

Variable	Regression Coef.	Std. err.	t	p-value
Children	-0.143***	0.009	-15.40	< .001
Area	-0.043***	0.011	-3.89	< .001
Income	0.149***	0.011	13.09	< .001
Degree	0.119**	0.046	2.61	0.009
_cons	3.693	0.238	15.50	< .001

$n = 10,942$

$R^2 = 0.034$

Adj. R-squared = 0.033

$F = 95.6$ (significance < .001)

Note: ** significant at 0.05, *** significant at 0.01

In the regression analysis, as shown in Table 4, the adjusted R-squared is 0.033. This suggests that 3.3% of the variance in Russian language proficiency levels among respondents is accounted for by the included socio-demographic factors. Notably, the coefficients for the independent variables Children (-0.143), Area (-0.043), Income (0.149), and Degree (0.119) are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The negative coefficients for Children and Area indicate that having more children and living in certain areas are associated with lower Russian language proficiency. Conversely, the positive coefficients for Income and Degree suggest that higher income levels and higher education degrees correspond to higher Russian language proficiency. The model's F-statistic (95.6, $p < 0.001$) indicates that the regression is statistically significant overall, though the low explanatory power suggests that additional factors influence Russian language proficiency.

Table 5.

Regression Results for English Language Proficiency

Variable	Regression Coef.	Std. err.	t	p-value
Children	-0.059***	0.007	-8.66	< .001
Area	0.052***	0.008	6.33	< .001
Income	-0.011	0.008	-1.35	0.178
Degree	-0.160***	0.034	-4.79	< .001
_cons	2.445	0.175	13.99	< .001

$n = 10,942$

$R^2 = 0.0126$

Adj. R-squared = 0.0122

$F = 34.9$ (significance < .001)

Note: ** significant at 0.05, *** significant at 0.01

The regression results in Table 5 show an adjusted R-squared of 0.0122, meaning that the included socio-demographic factors explain only 1.22% of the variation in English language

proficiency. Among the independent variables, Children (-0.059), Area (0.052), and Degree (-0.160) are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), whereas Income (-0.011, $p = 0.178$) does not show a meaningful effect. The negative coefficients for Children and Degree suggest that having more children and obtaining higher degrees are linked to lower English language proficiency, while living in certain areas (Area) is associated with higher proficiency. The F-statistic (34.9, $p < 0.001$) indicates that the model is statistically significant overall, though its low explanatory power suggests that additional factors influence English language proficiency beyond those analyzed.

Thus, Kazakh proficiency is positively associated with higher education and regional differences, but the model explains very little variance. Russian proficiency is most strongly influenced by socio-demographic factors, particularly income and family size. English proficiency is distinct in that higher education (Degree) negatively correlates with it, possibly indicating that civil servants with higher degrees have had less exposure to English.

These findings suggest that language acquisition in Kazakhstan is shaped by different socio-economic and regional dynamics, with Russian being the most structurally influenced, Kazakh being regionally dependent, and English proficiency being less tied to traditional education factors.

Proposed Model for Developing Language Competencies among Civil Servants in the Republic of Kazakhstan

When developing the proposed model for enhancing language competencies among civil servants in the Republic of Kazakhstan, we considered the results of empirical analysis, legislative requirements, and current assessment methods (see Figure 4). The model encompasses three main aspects:

- (1) Educational Programs
- (2) Motivational Mechanisms
- (3) Resources and Support

These three aspects were chosen because they are fundamental to creating a comprehensive framework for any language competency development. Educational programs provide the necessary knowledge and skills, ensuring that civil servants receive targeted training that meets their professional needs. Motivational mechanisms are crucial for fostering a positive attitude towards language learning and encouraging learners to engage with the material actively. Finally, resources and support ensure that infrastructure, tools, and materials are in place to facilitate effective learning. Together, these elements create a synergistic effect that can lead to significant improvements in language proficiency among civil servants, ultimately enhancing their ability to serve the public effectively.

Educational Programs

In the context of globalization, the Kazakh government has sought to promote a trilingual ideology among the population. As part of this initiative, English has been introduced as a language of instruction in master's degree programs. However, as Agbo and Pak (2017) note,

the effectiveness of this reform has been limited by traditionalism and deeply ingrained values in higher and postgraduate education.

It is evident that language proficiency among the population, including civil servants (who are essentially a cross-section of society), is highly dependent on the perceived value of each language. The importance of the Russian language in Kazakhstan, as in other post-Soviet states, is rooted not only in its status as a common lingua franca but also as a component of Soviet-era propaganda (Fierman, 2006). As the survey results demonstrate, the proportion of Kazakh citizens with low proficiency in Russian is the smallest among the three languages studied. As the language of education, Russian remains popular due to the methodological continuity of the Soviet system and its rich literary heritage. Despite the policy shift in educational priorities from Russian to Kazakh, the position of the Russian language in education remains strong.

In Kazakhstan, the professionalization of civil servants is guided by the principles established in the "Law on Civil Service" (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Civil Service," Article 34). There are also regulations that provide a differentiated approach to the training, retraining, and professional development of civil servants in categories "A" and "B." The development of training programs is overseen by the authorized organization, the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and its regional branches. Civil servants undergo professional development every three years, focusing on areas relevant to their functional responsibilities, with retraining lasting a minimum of 120 hours. Additionally, the Academy of Public Administration offers full-time and part-time master's and doctoral programs, emphasizing specialties in public administration. These programs are available exclusively for current civil servants with a certain level of work experience. Minimum Kazakh language proficiency requirements for applicants are set at the B1 level. Candidates take the KAZTEST, although no threshold score is required for entry into public service.

At the same time, Kazakh language proficiency remains a highly sought-after skill that needs further development in line with Kazakhstan's domestic policy priorities. Evidence suggests that high-level Kazakh language proficiency among citizens is more closely tied to their upbringing and living environment than to the quality of educational programs. Moreover, a commitment to using Kazakh in familial settings does not necessarily translate to its use in broader social contexts (Klimchenko, 2020). Empirical studies reveal a positive, statistically significant relationship between Kazakh language proficiency and educational attainment, including possession of a degree. These findings are supported by an analysis of educational requirements for specific student categories, including civil service programs, which impose mandatory proficiency thresholds in the state language.

Starting in 2022, the requirement for English language proficiency was eliminated for most master's programs at the Academy of Public Administration. This change was made in response to the low level of English proficiency among most civil servants in Kazakhstan and to ensure equal opportunities for those from remote rural areas. Despite the evident need for

language skills, no specialized language education programs are available for current civil servants or those applying for public service.

Figure 4.

Model for Enhancing Language Proficiencies among Civil Servants in Kazakhstan

Educational Programs	Motivational Mechanisms	Resources and Support
• Specialized Course Development: Designing tailored language courses for civil servants, aligning with their job requirements • Annual Seminars and Workshops: Organizing frequent seminars and workshops aimed at enhancing language proficiency • Online Learning Platforms and Webinars: Providing access to web-based language courses and webinars for self-paced learning • Educational Institution Partnerships: Forming alliances with universities and language institutes to offer specialized programs • Mentorship Initiatives: Assigning seasoned professionals to provide individualized support and guidance in language acquisition	• Financial Incentives: Offering extra payments and allowances for achieving proficiency in the state language. • Career Progression: Implementing language proficiency requirements for career advancement. • Recognition Programs: Issuing certificates and awards to acknowledge language learning accomplishments • Public Acknowledgment: Hosting competitions and events to publicly celebrate language learning achievements • Compulsory Assessments: Implementing mandatory language proficiency tests for all government staff • Incorporating Language Competencies into Performance Evaluations: Evaluating language skills as part of overall employee performance assessments	• Establishment of Language Centers: Establishing dedicated language centers tailored to government employees' needs • Library and Online Resource Accessibility: Ensuring access to libraries, online dictionaries, and educational platforms • Technological Assistance: Deploying automatic translation systems and other AI technologies to aid language acquisition • Scholarship Opportunities: Offering scholarships and grants to support language learning endeavors • Executive Endorsement: Engaging management actively in promoting language learning initiatives • Formation of Language Clubs: Forming clubs and communities to foster regular language practice and knowledge sharing

Motivational Mechanisms

Legislative incentives in Kazakhstan are extremely scarce. Overall, the lack of motivational factors, in our view, is one of the key reasons for the low commitment of the population to language learning.

First, for citizens who do not speak Kazakh or possess only a limited proficiency, as previously discussed, there are no barriers to entering public service or accessing government services. Legislative requirements do not enforce strict Kazakh language proficiency for civil servants in Kazakhstan. In practice, while there is a notable predominance of civil servants from the titular ethnicity, there is no linguistic or national discrimination in candidate selection. Mandatory certification of Kazakh language proficiency is required only for civil servants applying for state grants for specialized postgraduate educational programs. The unique KAZTEST system serves as a motivational tool, promoting Kazakh as a state language (Dinayeva

et al., 2016) and fostering general interest in language learning among the population. However, relying solely on formal requirements as motivational incentives is unlikely to enhance language proficiency enough to improve the workplace performance of civil servants.

Second, the use of English in everyday life and in public service is limited. Learning English is primarily a personal initiative for citizens of Kazakhstan, often tied to plans for enrolling in local or foreign universities, and less frequently related to the need for immigration or work abroad. Although specific studies on the motivational predisposition of Kazakh citizens to learn English have not been conducted, it is evident that there is a lack of aspiration for conscious self-development. This may be largely attributed to the "fear of academic failure," which is identified as a motivational factor according to You and Dörnyei (2016).

The lack of compulsory language requirements, beyond certain instances like state grant applicants, highlights gaps in policy effectiveness in countries where language proficiency is tied to national identity and administrative efficiency. Without comprehensive and sustained motivational mechanisms that integrate both extrinsic (legislative) and intrinsic (cultural pride, personal growth) motivations, language proficiency is unlikely to reach levels that significantly improve civil service performance. Kazakhstan's experience, therefore, contributes to the broader literature on public service reform and comparative public administration by showing how motivational mechanisms must go beyond formal assessments to affect workforce capabilities.

Resources and Support

Resources and support in the process of enhancing language competencies are associated, for example, with the use of open educational resources (Kwak, 2017), online dictionaries, and reference materials (Müller-Spitzer et al., 2018), among others. Mobile learning is considered one of the most effective contemporary methods for studying languages. Its advantages include improved accessibility to materials, enhanced cognitive abilities, and support for a personalized educational process (Kacetl & Klímová, 2019). Additionally, significant opportunities arise with the spread of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology. On the one hand, the availability and improvement of automatic translation systems enhance the quality of language used in official correspondence; on the other hand, they discourage citizens from mastering the language at the appropriate level. Currently, there is still a lack of high-quality open educational resources in Kazakh compared to those available in English. Therefore, government support in creating such resources is essential and irreplaceable.

The limited availability of high-quality resources in Kazakh, compared to English, demonstrates a critical gap that can hinder civil service performance in Kazakhstan and reflects challenges faced by other countries working to elevate a minority or regional language to a national or administrative status. Kazakhstan's situation echoes global struggles in the creation of robust educational content for less commonly spoken languages.

Furthermore, the prevalent Kazakh-Russian bilingualism facilitates the learning of a third language, such as English, due to the unique cognitive and linguistic processes in bilinguals

(Maluch et al., 2016). These population characteristics must be considered when developing an effective model for enhancing the language competencies of civil servants and all citizens. Bilingualism as seen in Kazakhstan is a valuable asset that can be leveraged in broader language competency models. This characteristic is crucial for comparative public service discussions, as Kazakhstan's experience can serve as a case study in how bilingual populations may more easily adopt multilingual policies. It provides insights into how linguistic diversity can either enhance or complicate language learning in the public sector, depending on the availability of adequate resources and support.

CONCLUSION

While this article explores proficiencies across three languages (Kazakh, Russian, English), its primary focus lies in enhancing Kazakh language competencies among civil servants in Kazakhstan. Empirical findings reveal that socio-demographic characteristics explain a modest portion of language proficiency variance (3-5%). Notably, all three language skills exhibit a positive yet weak correlation with civil servants' education levels. Proficiency in Kazakh also correlates positively with respondents' academic qualifications. The presence of children in the family shows a slight positive association with Kazakh proficiency, a negligible negative link with Russian proficiency, and no discernible connection with English proficiency.

The proposed model for enhancing language competencies among civil servants in Kazakhstan revolves around three key areas: educational programs, incentives, and resource allocation.

The findings emphasize the need for more targeted educational programs that align with Kazakhstan's domestic policy priorities and the practical language needs of its civil servants. Kazakhstan's experience offers valuable insights for other countries grappling with similar challenges in public sector education reform, particularly in multilingual societies. This study highlights the critical role that comprehensive and context-sensitive educational initiatives play in advancing the professionalization of civil servants, and how the success of such initiatives is contingent not only on formal policy but also on the integration of language skills into broader educational frameworks.

Additionally, the research underscores the importance of not only setting formal language policies but also providing the necessary incentives and resources to ensure these policies translate into practical improvements in public service. The Kazakhstani case, with its multilingual landscape and evolving language policies, contributes valuable insights to global discussions on public sector reform, multilingual governance, and civil service education. The findings from this research emphasize the need for comprehensive strategies that integrate motivational tools, legislative requirements, and modern educational resources. As public service continues to evolve in increasingly multilingual contexts globally, Kazakhstan's experience highlights both the challenges and opportunities in promoting language competency as part of broader public sector capacity building efforts.

One limitation of this study is the absence of endogeneity testing for independent variables. Despite employing multiple linear regression to analyze various factors' impact on language proficiency, potential endogenous relationships between independent variables and model errors remain unexplored due to a lack of suitable instrumental variable data. Nevertheless, the regression analysis results offer valuable insights into the interplay of sociodemographic factors and language proficiency.

Future research endeavors could focus on gathering more extensive data, including potential instrumental variables, for a more precise estimation and endogeneity testing. Additionally, investigating language proficiency levels in relation to the number of languages spoken by civil servants in Kazakhstan presents a promising avenue. Given Kazakhstan's significant bilingual population, this area of inquiry holds relevance for linguistics and education researchers.

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APPENDIX

Table 2.

Social-Demographic Data of Survey Respondents

Variables	%	Variables	%
Gender		Number of Children	
Male	36.3	No children	18.3
Female	63.7	One	18.5
Age		Two	28.0
20-25	7.3	Three	20.2
26-30	16.2	Four	9.8
31-35	18.3	Five	3.7
36-40	16.4	Six	1.0
41-45	14.4	Seven	0.3
46-50	10.3	More than 7	0.1
51-55	8.3		
56-60	8.0		
61-65	0.8	Income*	
More than 65	0.0	Below 100,000 KZT	7.23
Level of Education		100,000-199,999 KZT	49.42
High school graduate	0.11	200,000-299,999 KZT	27.85
College graduate	7.91	300,000-399,999 KZT	8.72
Bachelor graduate	83.12	400,000-499,999 KZT	3.62
Master's degree graduate	8.21	500,000-599,999 KZT	1.67
PhD, residence graduate	0.53	600,000-699,999 KZT	0.73
Doctor of Science	0.13	700,000-799,999 KZT	0.34
Marital Status		800,000-899,999 KZT	0.07
Married	62.94	900,000- 999,999 KZT	0.19
Single	22.72	Above 1,000,000 KZT	0.16
Divorced	11.16		
Widow/Widower	3.18		

*1 KZT = 0.002017 USD