

## Examining teachers' views on the implementation of English as L3 into primary schools: A case of Kazakhstan

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### Abstract

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan changed the State Educational Program for primary education and the curriculum for teaching English as a third language (L3) to grades 1-4 in 2013. As with many changes in the curriculum, English language teaching has also been changed and the starting age for learning of English language has been lowered to 6-7 years of age (Grade 1). However, implementation of the curriculum requires readiness on the part of the teachers and teachers' views about teaching English in primary school is important for successful implementation of English language policy. Thus, this research aims to investigate the teachers' views about the starting age for L3 learning, teachers' professional development, teaching materials and problems of implementation of a language policy in primary schools in Kazakhstan. The data for the study was gathered from 105 English teachers working in different primary schools. The study revealed that most have not yet made a transition to the organized system of teaching English languages in primary school.

**Keywords:** Young learners, English language teaching, primary school, professional development, teaching materials.

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### Introduction

In the last two decades, the importance of the English language in Kazakhstani society is increasingly being discussed in the press and at research forums, and proficiency in English has been widely regarded as a national as well as a personal asset (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Adamson, 2001; Hu, 2002a; Jin & Cortazzi, 2003). In the Annual Address of the President, Nursultan Nazarbayev – to the people of Kazakhstan "Kazakhstan Way – 2050: Common Goal, Common Interest and Common Future" (2015) the President mentioned that "We have a great deal of work to do to improve the quality of all parts of national education. For a modern citizen of Kazakhstan, proficiency in three languages is a requirement for self well-being. High school graduates should speak Kazakh, Russian and English. Therefore, I believe by 2020 the proportion of the English speaking population should be at least 20 percent".

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On a national level, English language has been viewed by Kazakhstani leadership as having a vital role to play in national modernization and development (Ross, 1992; Adamson & Morris, 1997). On an individual level, proficiency in English can lead to a host of economic, social and educational opportunities; that is, it can provide access to both material resources and 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1991) for the betterment of personal well-being. For example, it is a great opportunity to get higher education at home or abroad, lucrative employment in the public or private sector, professional advancement and social prestige (Hu, 2002b, 2003; Jiang, 2003). Due to the prominence accorded to English and the escalating demands for English proficiency, huge national and individual efforts and resources have been invested in English language education and development (Niu & Wolff, 2003).

Currently, the general conceptual basis of language development in Kazakhstan is "The State program of languages functioning and development: 2011-2020", which is designed to be implemented over a period of ten years. The main objective of the program is to expand and strengthen the social and communicative functions of the state language (Kazakh), to preserve of common culture features of Russian language and to assist in the development of English and other foreign languages. In the framework of the State program of functioning and development of languages, the realization of a national cultural project "Trinity of languages", which establishes the rules for the content and the level of bachelor preparation as well as, the volume of workload in Kazakh, Russian and English, has started.

Substantial reforms are being carried out as part of the implementation of a qualitative transition to instruction in pilot projects at different levels (schools, colleges, universities) where students are taught in three languages. Excellent results have been achieved by the Kazakh-Turkish lyceum; multilingual education has been successfully implemented in the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools with the help of professionally trained teaching staff, efficient teaching technologies and the desire of students to study in three languages (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015). Since 2004, 32 schools have introduced an experimental program of studying English starting from the second grade with one hour per week. In 2011, English was studied from Grade 2 in 115 schools, involving a total contingent of more than 51,000 students.

Early learning to master foreign languages has been considered in the State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for the period of 2011-2020. The program aims at bringing together the existing practice of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) and international experience in the same field (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015). Also, the program ensures the continuity of foreign language education and consistency of educational programs; it determines the high quality and efficiency of a multilingual personal development as one of the most significant factors in the development of the intellectual potential of a country (SP of DE RK, 2010).

The last decade saw a renewed attempt to expand English into the primary curriculum. In accordance with the strategic plan of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MES of RK) for the years 2011-2015, in 2013 State Educational Standards (SES) were developed for primary education and curriculum for teaching English to Grades 1-4. The new curriculum offers considerable changes in language education. The starting age for English language learning (ELL) is lowered to 6-7 years of age (Grade 1). English has been included as a compulsory subject in the state curriculum in the field of "Language and Literature" from the first grade. This emphasizes the importance of all three languages (Kazakh, Russian and English) in the development and education of students as well as the importance of language development as the foundation of all education (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015). In the new curriculum, there have been some changes mostly related to the need for developing communicative competence in English. The curriculum was

organized on two axes: Instructional design and assessment in language teaching. Within these axes, the recent curriculum emphasized listening and speaking over reading and writing. Thus, in the first grade literacy skills are not included; reading and writing are introduced at the second grade only. Moreover, the recent curriculum emphasizes intercultural communication and suggests the integration of cultural content to the thematic units.

However, no matter how carefully the new curriculum was planned, effective language learning depends on teachers' knowledge, skills and professional development. Changes in a TEYL curriculum should satisfy the teachers' need for the profound qualifications regarding interactional and communicative competences (Komorowska, 1997). Regarding the effectiveness of TEYL, the quality of the teaching force, as well as training provided to the teachers, become key considerations. Although theoretical points are important in the decision making process when lowering the age of ELL, current resources, the teachers' professional development and readiness in TEYL as well as their theoretical and current practical knowledge should also be considered. In sum, as Tinsley and Comfort (2012) states, an early start to FLE can only be beneficial through some key concerns: sufficient time allocation, qualified and 'sufficient number of well-trained teachers', 'age-appropriate pedagogy', and 'a suitable curriculum context'. Therefore, before any changes are put into practice, present infrastructure needs to be determined to improve the decisions made at the governmental level. From this aspect the present study is an attempt to analyze the current situation from the teachers' point of view. The contexts in which educational policies are tempted to make changes towards the point where lowering the LL age is a consideration, contribution, and readiness need to be taken into consideration. For this purpose in mind, the current study aims to investigate teachers' views about the starting age for English learning, language teachers' professional development and their readiness to teach EL from Grade 1, primary school current resources, activities that are used in primary schools by language teachers, as well as the problems that still exist, in the development of teaching English to young learners.

## Method

To address these issues in the study different sources and scientific methods were used: the study of literature, interviews and questionnaires for the teachers who teach English in the primary schools, quantitative and content analyses.

The introduction of the SES project in Kazakhstan raises many questions in terms of teachers' awareness on the underlying principles and theories of early LL, their points of view about the appropriate age to start L2 and L3 education, their ideas about current resources for TEYL, and their current classroom activities. A survey type research design is used in the current study to find answers to the following questions:

- Which age is going to be successful for ELL?
- Which type of professional development concerning TEYL teachers have passed?
- Are teachers provided with modern teaching materials (programs, curriculum and instructional kits (CIK), methodological literature, etc.)?
- What activities are used in primary schools by language teachers?
- What are the reasons for young learners' low level of results in the study of the foreign language?

105 English teachers working in primary schools in Kazakhstan took part in the questionnaire. The average work experience of the respondents in these organizations was more than twelve years. The questionnaire was conducted in general education schools,

where the pilot project on early learning of English (starting from Grade 2) had not been previously conducted, as well as in gymnasium schools, where there had been some experience in early learning of English (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015).

To conduct the questionnaire, we prepared the questions (closed and open-ended) that aimed to find teachers' views about the most appropriate time to start learning of English; language teachers' professional development and the quality and availability of resources required for the organization of the educational process (teaching and learning materials for teachers and students). Its goal was also to determine whether these resources are used efficiently. The second unit with 14 closed and open-ended questions aimed to investigate teachers' major pedagogies which are used in classes and reasons for young learners' low level of results in the study of the foreign language. In this study, we sought to identify what difficulties arise for primary school language teachers as well as to find out what teachers require in order to improve the educational process in the primary school to conduct efficient English lessons (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015).

A five-step scale was necessary to prepare the questionnaire. It was given to five experts in Foreign languages department of Y.A. Buketov Karaganda State University for the content. According to the Lawshe technique (1975) at least five experts are necessary to evaluate a given questionnaire. The experts rated each item in the questionnaire as the item "measures the target construct, relevant to target construct but unnecessary, or cannot measure the target construct" (Yurdugül, 2005). According to the experts' opinions, the content validity ratio was found to be 80% in the initial version of the questionnaire. Finally, it became the basis for the preparation of the questionnaire in an electronic format for teachers who are willing to take part in the study. For the open-ended questions a content analysis was made.

Enthusiasm for "the younger the better" has always been high; however it has sometimes met critical evaluations (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Saez, 2001; Nikolov, 2002). In response to the evaluations, 'intellectual readiness of young learners' and 'the critical period hypothesis' (CPH) have always been the most cited issues used to support the claims of early language learning in academic debates. Although there are large amounts of empirical findings, the benefits of early language learning are still questionable: some academicians support the CPH (Dekeyser and Larson-Hall, 2005; Long, 2005; Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson, 2001), whereas others claim that there is not such a critical period (Bialystok, 2001; Birdsong, 2005; Moyer, 2004). It is clearly seen that there is not any firm conclusions about young learners' early start to foreign language (FL). On the other hand, there is an agreement that young learners learn languages in a different way than older learners and have some advantages over the older ones who start later. What is much clearer is that the reasons for an early start need to be understood well before introduction and implementation of early language learning (ELL) programs.

## **Results**

The first unit of the questionnaire showed the results about the most appropriate time to start English learning. The results revealed that most of the teachers (89%) supported the idea "the younger the better" and that the most appropriate time to teach EL should start from Grade 1 of primary school and earlier, and only 4.5% of the participants thought that teaching EL at this stage is not effective. The majority (90.1%) agreed that children are ready to learn EL from Grade 1 of primary school, explaining their reasons in the open-ended questions. Most of the participants (89.1 %) thought that the English teaching hours in primary school should be increased and 86.2 % of them stated that providing a one-year intensive pre-schooling preparation is important for learners' ELL.

The survey reveals that the resources needed to ensure the favourable conditions necessary for a successful early start in English language learning are inadequate in many contexts. Of

fundamental importance is the pre-service training and continuing professional development of the teachers of English, in both English language and teaching methodology, so they develop the confidence and ability to create the natural, language-rich environment conducive to the early years and primary English language classrooms and meet the evolving needs of their 21st century learners.

The expansion of English provision in the late 1990s and early 2000s created a shortage of teachers and led to the admission of numerous untrained teachers into the teaching force. New linguistic construction in the country is caused by a number of problems: weak methodology of teaching foreign languages, the lack of foreign language specialists. It should be noted that several factors make the modernization of primary school education complicated. One such factor is a shortage of teachers familiar with the methods for teaching English to young learners (TEYL) (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015).

The suggestions for solving the teacher shortage problem may reflect a lack of understanding of the challenges in teaching English to young learners. Teachers can be considered qualified if they are not only competent in the target language, but also know how to teach young learners. Teachers' language proficiency is important in that and determinant of what students can achieve in a foreign language learning context, given that teachers are the major source of students' language input (Hu, 2007). And since young learners have age-specific characteristics with regard to cognitive development, learning style, and attention span (Brown, 2001), teachers should also know how to tailor their instruction to the needs of young learners. In the absence of qualified teachers, low quality instruction may de-motivate young learners (Cameron, 2003) and even interfere with their future learning.

The reform of the foreign language policy in Kazakhstan within the framework of current socio-economic conditions presents special requirements for the teaching staff. Much attention is paid to the training and professional development of teachers, conducted in accordance with State orders and professional development of teaching staff.

The Kazakhstan 2011 – 2020 education strategy set a target of developing 'the training system and professional development of the teaching staff of Kazakhstan'. In response to this target, in May 2011, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan set up the Centre of Excellence (CoE) program under the auspices of the Autonomous Education Organization (AEO) 'Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools' (NIS). The strategic plan included a target of training 120,000 teachers by 2016; that is, approximately 40% of the 307,000 comprehensive schools teachers of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In October 2011 the University of Cambridge became a strategic partner in this educational reform process.

The Teacher Education Reform program is mainly aimed to develop the expertise and learning of teachers in the system of public school, so that the young people of Kazakhstan will become global learners in the 21st century. A further aim is also to establish a network of professional development centers, teacher training centers, advanced training courses. These centers provide leadership throughout the regions of Kazakhstan to aid the development process, so that it will be more likely to be sustained beyond the joint CoE – University of Cambridge (UoC) stages of training.

Effective teachers' development demands both more and different forms of professional development. Too often, courses are isolated events that are not connected to changes in schools. More effective forms of development tend to be welcomed by teachers themselves, who are often willing to contribute to the cost of such education in money and time. Effective individual professional development sits alongside collective learning, with teachers exchanging ideas and collaborating to improve classroom practice; but this

remains all too rare. The existing teaching force can be supported through flexible approaches to career development and employment conditions (OECD, 2011).

Continuous professional development is needed to update skills and knowledge in a range of ways. According to OECD (2011), the development of teachers beyond their initial education can serve a range of purposes, including to:

- update individuals' knowledge of a subject in light of recent advances in the area;
- update individuals' skills and approaches in light of the development of new teaching techniques and objectives, new circumstances, and new educational research;
- enable individuals to apply changes made to curricula or other aspects of teaching practice;
- enable schools to develop and apply new strategies concerning the curriculum and other aspects of teaching practice;
- exchange information and expertise among teachers and others, e.g. academics and industrialists; or
- help weaker teachers become more effective (OECD, 2011).

In Kazakhstan, ongoing professional development already plays an important role. In different regions/oblasts of Kazakhstan, each teacher is expected to engage one month or more of professional development every five years to keep up with the rapid changes occurring in the world and to be able to improve their skills and knowledge (OECD, 2011).

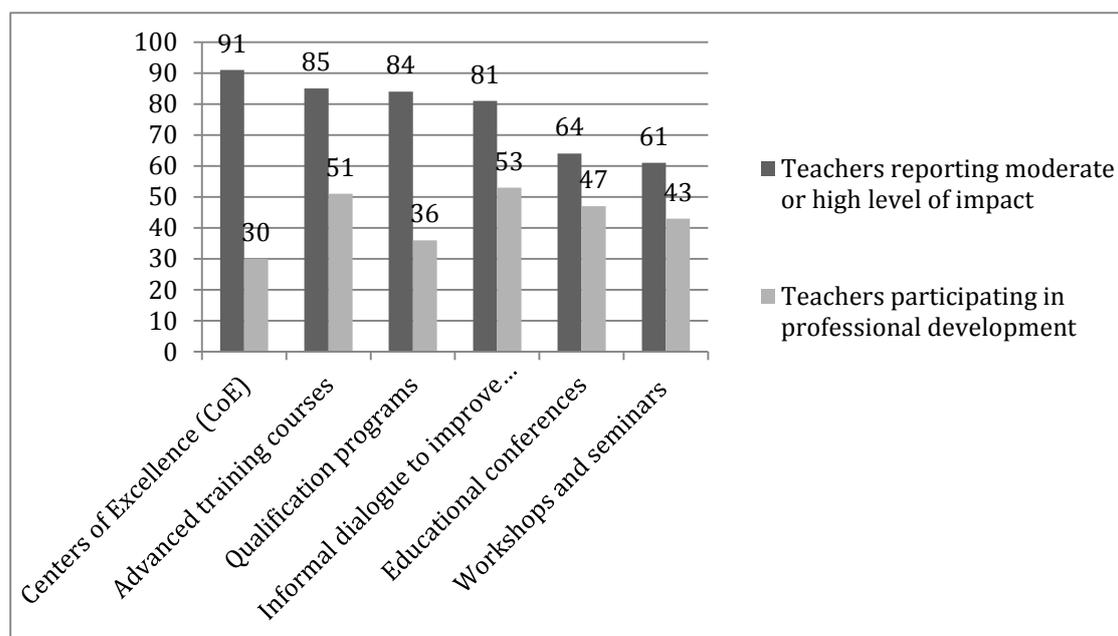
More generally, the results presented below show that almost 40% of language teachers participated in some form of professional development over one month period and, on average, spent just under one day per month in professional development. However, there is considerable variation in the incidence and intensity of teacher participation in professional development. Activities are ranked in descending order of the percentage of teachers reporting a moderate or high impact of the professional development they took (OECD, 2011).

According to the data of the study, today about half of all English language teachers working in primary schools are not able to take professional development and advanced training courses in a timely manner, which has a general negative impact on the level of TEYL. Only 30% of English language teachers attended Centres of Excellence and 51 % had opportunity to attend advanced training courses. Colbert, Brown, Choi & Thomas (2008) stated that improving teacher quality is both common and necessary, and it depends on professional development, which should create meaningful learning experiences for teachers. Institutions of higher education realize this fact and organize training sessions, seminars, and conferences for English teachers. More than 40% of English teachers attended Educational conferences, workshops and seminars available to them.

The survey found that nearly half of the teachers surveyed reported they wanted more professional development than they received during the one month period. The study also revealed that thirty per cent of teachers have low levels of intrinsic motivation for self-improvement: professional development mostly takes place because of the school administration order, and not by the teachers' own initiative (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015). The reasons for this condition are as follows:

- shortage of state funding for teachers' professional development;

- insufficient motivation of the teachers to improve their professional level (both intellectual and material);
- lack of employer support;
- too expensive;
- the lack of suitable opportunities for professional development.



**Figure 1.** Comparison of impact and participation by types of professional development activity (%)

These conditions define an obvious need for the creation of an optimal model of professional development and advanced training of foreign language teachers taking into account the specifics of teaching in primary schools. Therefore, it becomes a goal of the Ministry of Education to find new resources for professional development of the teachers to prepare them for a new professional activity such as TEYL (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015).

The situation concerning both which materials are used to teach YLs, and their availability varies greatly. Teaching is going to be more efficient and will ensure a high level of achievement of students in the foreign language study, if the teachers are provided with modern teaching materials (programs, curriculum and instructional kits (CIK), methodological literature, etc.) (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015).

One of the pressing problems in the sphere of teaching/learning foreign languages was related to methodological support of the educational process. To support curriculum and syllabus developments, a new policy on textbook production has been adopted since 2011. It was decided to create subject-specific curriculum and instructional kits (CIK) consisting of the following components: workbook, student's book, teacher's book, audio, didactic materials, methodological guidelines for teachers, etc. Attention was focused on the textbooks which logically hold a central position of CIK and are used as a standard work for the study of a subject. In language classrooms all over the world, textbooks are the most dominant teaching and learning materials (Basal, Celen, Kaya & Bogas, 2016).

The new policy has allowed considerable local autonomy in textbooks development. In 2011, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) of the Republic of Kazakhstan set up a

CIK evaluation committee responsible for assessing locally developed textbooks and granting publication permissions. Subsequently, several agencies and institutions were commissioned to develop new English language textbooks for use in primary schools in Kazakhstan.

The study revealed that there were a great number (63%) of complains about the quality of textbooks from the teachers and there were several reasons for that. Firstly, like in other post-Soviet countries, the educational system of Kazakhstan was developed on the basis of the Soviet system of education, in which it was common practice to provide students with a lot of knowledge, and the textbooks reflected the situation.

Due to relative inertness of the approach to education the former principles of materials election and evaluation of textbooks continue to apply, although now other selection principles are required (Zuev, 2004; Bespalko, 2006; Bespalko, 2007).

Cunningsworth (1995) proposes four criteria for evaluating textbooks, particularly coursebooks:

1. They should correspond to learner's needs. They should match the aim and objectives of the language-learning program.
2. They should reflect the uses (present or future) which learners will make of the language. Textbooks should be chosen that will help equip students to use language effectively for their own purposes.
3. They should take into account students' needs as learners and should facilitate their learning processes, without dogmatically imposing a rigid "method".
4. They should have a clear role as a support for learning. Like teachers, they mediate between the target language and the learner.

Kazakhstani authors have no much experience in developing English textbooks. It is evident that good textbooks cannot be developed in a year and many countries have many decades of experience in creation, evaluation and adaptation of textbooks. Furthermore, the materials were not adapted to fit the specific Kazakhstani context whilst also being grounded in rigorous research evidence and practical teacher education experience.

Our country is only accumulating such experience. In recent years a series of positive measures were undertaken in order to improve the quality of textbooks. For example, the Uchebnik (Textbook) Republican Research and Practical Center (RRPC) and the state system for expert evaluation of the quality of school textbooks were established. The system of multistage expert examination of the quality of text books consists of the Department of the Ministry of Education, the Uchebnik RRPC, the National Academy of Education, and the Republican Council on the Quality of Textbooks. Well-known teachers, deputies of the Parliament, members of the Government, and representatives of the local executive bodies are involved in the work of the Council.

In our opinion, there are more steps to be undertaken. Firstly, within the framework of the Uchebnik RRPC it is necessary to establish a think tank, similar to the body that existed during the era of the Soviet Union at the Prosveshchenie Publishing House; the best methodologists in every school subject should be invited to become members of this think tank (Beilinson, 2005). Secondly, it is necessary to ensure that, as was initially planned, every writing team includes the following members: a researcher who is responsible for reflection of the current level of the science in question in the textbook, a practicing teacher who should take care that the researcher does not go too far, and a didactic teacher in the specific subject who ensures continuity and compliance with the methodological principles in the course of development of CIK with respect to several grades (e.g. 1-2 or 3-4). Thirdly,

all authors should take a course in didactics and technology of compilation of modern traditional and electronic (multimedia) textbooks oriented at the competence-based approach.

The content of the program and curriculum and instructional kit (CIK) is a very significant aspect, as young learners are going to use them to obtain basic knowledge and master the material. Their quality will determine how quickly and easily a child will be involved in the process of learning the foreign language, and what knowledge s/he is going to obtain before s/he gets to high school. Availability of quality course-books and teaching materials used in the educational process in accordance with SES of primary education is also one of the criteria to perform educational activities (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015).

More recently, a number of local education departments and publishers have been collaborating with overseas publishers and textbook writers in producing up-to-date learning materials. For instance, the most widely used textbook series, Primary Colours for Kazakhstan, are results of collaboration among Uchebnik (Textbook) Republican Research and Practical Center (RRPC) and Cambridge University Press. Compared with their predecessors, recent textbooks are more innovative, learner-centered and communicatively-oriented because of their incorporation of new conceptions of education and international developments in language education (Adamson and Morris, 1997; Hu, 2002a). The big challenge, however, is to train classroom practitioners to use the new textbooks effectively. There is some evidence that as a result of outdated pre service preparation and inadequate in-service support, many teachers fail to understand the underlying principles of the textbooks and use them in traditional ways (Leng, 1997; Ng & Tang, 1997; Jin & Cortazzi, 2003). In addition, not all the teachers (35%) are fully provided with the methodological aids, and not all the students (26%) are provided with the course-books and workbooks. There is no required basis of the state language (Kazakh) to teach English (quality dictionaries, course-books, translated literature etc.). The lack of suitable teaching and learning materials, that systematically and purposefully meet the modern objectives, content and technology of early learning the language, makes the process of language teaching and professional teacher training process not efficient enough (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015).

The availability of teaching and learning materials helps to increase young learners' achievements in foreign language learning, but it is not the only factor. The importance of the way TEYL is used by the teachers has a significant impact on young learners' results. According to the survey, teachers do not use a large number or wide variety of activities in their classes. The teachers who advocate an early start emphasize the use of appropriate teaching techniques with children to reach the desired outcomes (Gürsoy, E., Korkmaz, S.Ç., & Damar, A. E. (2013). These techniques involve activity-based teaching (NR, 2010) during which children learn by developing experiences with the language. Children learn indirectly as they focus on meaning rather than form (Gürsoy, 2012b; Moon, 2000). Table 1 presents activities for YLs used often at the lesson by the majority of teachers.

A number of 'traditional' activities were popular, including repeating after the teacher, reading out loud, gap-fills, grammar exercises, and memorization of words or phrases. The majority of teachers also used role play but role-plays can be used both for communicative, meaning-focused activities and for more drill-like, accuracy-focused activities. However, 'creative' activities were not frequently used, particularly games and songs. In the estimation of most teachers the creative activities are connected with certain difficulties such as stating the assignments, time consumed for their fulfillment and assessment. Other activities that at least 40 per cent of teachers reported using rarely or never were a mixture of traditional and creative: listening to a CD or tape-recorder, computer work, watching

TV/videos. What is least surprising is the low report of children doing computer work. In many schools, computers remain a luxury and internet access is limited.

**Table 1.** *Activities that are used in primary schools by language teachers (N=105)*

Activities	<i>n</i>	%
Children repeating after the teacher	77	73.3
Children reading out loud	73	69.5
Filling gaps/blanks in exercises	67	63.8
Role-play	63	60
Grammar exercises	58	55.2
Children memorizing words and phrases	58	55.2
Handwriting exercises	54	51.4
Playing games	53	50.4
Songs	52	49.5
Listening to tape-recorder/CD	51	48.5
Translation exercises	51	48.5
Activities on the computer	47	44.7
Watching videos/TV	40	38

The use of optimal conditions: appropriately trained teachers, suitable learning materials, various tools and activities in teaching foreign languages enables better teaching and higher achievements by the learners. The analysis showed that the foreign language teachers in primary schools have a low level of professional development, are not fully provided with the methodological guides and use the limited number of teaching activities. A minor quality change is observed in the use of teaching activities. Considering such conditions of teaching, it is impossible to expect high achievements of learners in the foreign language field.

Other factors have been considered leading to the decrease in the achievements of the learners studying the foreign language. The teachers believe that there are many reasons for the learners' low achievements in the study of the English language. Table 2 presents the teachers' opinions on the reasons.

**Table 2.** *The reasons for young learners' low level of results in the study of the foreign language (%)*

<b>The reasons for low results</b>	<b>Agree %</b>	<b>Disagree %</b>	<b>No idea %</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Insufficient qualification of the teacher	94.4	5.6	0	4.70	.618
Lack of methodology for teaching foreign languages in the primary school	91.5	8.4	0	4.60	.726
No experience in teaching young learners	93	7	0	4.56	.711
Non-availability of the resource base	91.5	7	1.4	4.40	.820
Non-availability of the teaching materials complying with the modern requirements	86.1	13.9	0	4.37	.925
Non-availability of an individual room for the foreign language study	78.2	15.9	5.8	4.26	1.158
Non-availability of the teachers' own practical worksheets	84.1	14.4	1.4	4.26	1.038
Non-availability of qualified guidance	70.4	25.8	3.8	4.24	1.129
Inefficient goal-setting	70.4	26.8	2.8	3.97	1.218

The teachers believe that the great negative impact on the learners' achievements is caused by the low qualification of the teacher (94.4%), lack of methodology for teaching foreign

languages in the primary school (91.5%), no experience in teaching young learners (93%) and non-availability of the resource base (91.5%) (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015).

More than 85% of the teachers state that the learners' low achievements in the study of English language are caused by the non-availability of the teaching materials that meet the modern requirements (86.1%).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The results of the current research are important as it gives insights about English teachers' ideas about the language policy of lowering the age for EL teaching and learning. It has examined what is behind the policy according to the teachers' views by identifying factors contributing to and problems in its implementation. Policy changes mandating the earlier introduction of English are increasingly being implemented in Kazakhstan. Although research has suggested that age may have an effect as to the way a language is learned, age alone does not determine success in learning a foreign language. As various sociocultural contexts, government policies, and historical language practices will all impact the success or failure of TEYL, there is no single best way to implement English as a foreign for young learners. Rather, effective TEYL starts with a clear understanding of the following factors and how they relate to one another.

The reality check on the policy indicates that it was issued without sufficient preparation for implementation. In fact, the country was largely unprepared for a large-scale promotion of primary English education when the policy document was released (Y.Hu, 2007). Policy decisions on the starting age for teaching and learning of English need to take into account a large number of contextual and resource factors. There are conditions that are required, for example, the availability of teachers with a high level of proficiency in the target language and professional training, resources necessary to support new curriculum, teaching methodology geared to the learning needs of young children, as well as consistent and well-designed follow-up instruction in the Grades 1-4. At present, these conditions are largely missing in the Kazakhstani context.

As for the age at which compulsory English learning begins, the majority of the teachers are in favor of an early start in primary school. This inclination of language teachers to start FLL in the Grade 1 of the primary classroom show supportive evidence for the new education curriculum, which offers compulsory ELT at around the ages 6-7 at the Grade 1. Their responses indicate high consistency with the recent literature about the issue. On the issue, the report prepared by European Commission (2011) highlights the importance of early start of FLE explaining that children at early ages learn the language in an unconscious way.

The second issue relates to the teachers' professional development. Particular problems are the lack of staff teaching English to young learners and non-availability of conditions required for re-training and advanced development of the teachers. The situation concerning language teachers' professional development in Kazakhstan really leaves much to be desired. Proficiency in the target language alone is not a sufficient qualification for TEYL. Teaching English to young learners requires specialized training for teachers and special methodology. Therefore, qualified teacher should not only demonstrate written and oral proficiency in the English language (regardless of native language), but should also demonstrate teaching competency. Teachers should have training in teaching English, as well as in the ways young students learn. Effective language teachers should themselves be successful and experienced learners. Just as important are teachers' personal attitudes toward continued education and learning and their willingness to model language learning for the students with whom they work. Language teachers should receive the necessary professional development from qualified EFL teacher educators. Analysis showed that about half of all foreign language teachers working in primary schools were not able to take

professional development timely. Schools and public authorities should make a significant investment in teachers' professional development. Considering such shortage of qualified primary school English teachers, it is impossible to expect high achievements of learners in the foreign language field. The in-service training of teachers to teach young learners needs to be considerably strengthened.

The situation concerning both which materials are used to teach YLs and their availability varies greatly. Depending upon the curriculum and methodology employed, institutions need to be able to provide the type and level of resources necessary to support the curriculum. Support materials should be designed for both teachers and students with the appropriate cultural context of the country (Kazakhstan) in mind. Teachers' views on teaching materials revealed that teaching materials for students and teachers aligning with new requirements for primary school ELT were partially available. Teachers have found themselves with a lack of suitable materials, either because materials are not available (Hoque, 2009; Y. Hu, 2007; Mathew and Pani, 2009). Local textbook production containing the Kazakhstani cultural content has not necessarily been a satisfactory solution. As Hoque (2009) points out, textbook writing committees are led by academics with little experience of teaching at the primary level. The solution has been to use cooperation between local publishers and overseas publishers and textbooks writers (G. Hu, 2005a). Even where books do exist, they may not be available to the children (Mathew and Pani, 2009). Moreover, teachers may need training to use the new books; otherwise they continue to employ previous methods (Nur, 2003).

Where textbooks are inadequate, teachers often lack the time and expertise to develop appropriate materials (Li, 1998). Yet good materials may have an important role to play as they can become the 'de facto' curriculum. As Nur (2003:168) points out, where there is a lack of qualified teachers, 'textbooks appear to have a strong positive impact'.

An expanded range of materials for teaching young learners is needed. Materials development and their use should become a key area for research and development in the field. Materials need to be available in as many formats as possible to respond to local conditions.

Another important finding that is worth mentioning is related to the use of activities by teachers. The analysis showed that a number of 'traditional' activities were popular, but 'creative' activities were not frequently used by English language teachers. The 'creative' activities are connected with certain difficulties such as stating the assignments, time consumed for their fulfillment and assessment (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015). Meanwhile, the data may mean that the teachers do not take into consideration the learners' "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978); therefore, they do not always plan and consider the developing objectives for their lessons.

Finally, research results revealed factors leading to the decrease in the achievements of the learners studying the foreign language. The introduction of English at younger ages is not in itself problematic but it can become so when it is not matched by the material and teacher education resources needed to ensure that the appropriate conditions for learning are in place. As this research has shown, the reality is that resources in many contexts are either lacking or not forthcoming to the extent needed.

Future studies can also examine the policy in classroom settings—investigating how policy rhetoric is being translated into classroom reality. In addition, the pedagogical and sociopolitical impact of the policy—how it has affected ELT at the junior secondary school level and beyond and how it has affected students, primary schools, and Kazakhstani society—is worth further exploration. Findings of such studies, along with those of the present study, can contribute to a comprehensive evaluation of the policy and further

insights into policy implementation that can best serve Kazakhstan needs for proficiency in English (Y. Hu, 2007).



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