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**Analyzing Second language acquisition through Learning Styles and Pedagogical Implications of EMI Phenomenon in Higher Education: Insights from Kazakhstani Experience**

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**Analyzing Second language acquisition through Learning Styles and Pedagogical  
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**Abstract:**

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) programs have witnessed substantial growth in non-Anglophone nations, shaping diverse multilingual educational landscapes, and second language acquisition (SLA) has been important throughout the implementation of EMI. This paper analyze individual characteristics, sociocultural factors, and learning styles influencing SLA. In addition, the study addresses the challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of EMI in Kazakhstan. This study emphasizes the importance of tailored pedagogical approaches in the acquisition of SLA. In addition, the paper highlights that cognitive, affective, and physiological behaviors, play a crucial role in how learners perceive and respond to the language learning environment. Therefore, recommends the adaptation of diverse learning styles which fits the student preferences. The examination of EMI experiences in Kazakhstan highlights linguistic competence issues and the need for a nuanced understanding of the transition from Russian or Kazakh medium of instruction to EMI. Additionally, the study sheds light on teachers' perceptions and challenges in delivering EMI, emphasizing the necessity for adequate training. Besides the challenges, the implementation of EMI has positive outcomes like international exposure for students, enhanced career prospects for teachers, and the overall enrichment of the learning environment.

**Keywords:** Second Language Acquisition, English as a Medium of Instruction, Learning Styles, Kazakhstani Higher Education



## 1. Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) refers to the learning of a new language and “second” in this SLA context can refer to any language, which is learned after the mother tongue, thus it can refer to the third or fourth language (Hoque, 2017). In the case of SLA the newly learned language does not necessarily have to be a foreign or international language. For instance, a person can naturally learn a language as a result of living in a country where it is spoken or learn it in a classroom through instruction (Ellis, 2015b). According to Ellis (2015), the SLA has two main objectives of SLA are description and explanation (Ellis, 2015a) and no matter how the language is acquired if the objectives are satisfied it can be associated with SLA. However, there is a wide range of individual characteristics and sociocultural factors that have an impact on the process of acquiring a second language. Some examples of sociocultural factors are exposure to a second language, social relationships, teaching methods, feedback, and sociocultural context (Dewaele, 2009). The individual characteristics include motivation, age, gender, aptitude, learning strategies and styles, personality, and learner beliefs (Ellis, 2004).

The SLA have been a part of multilingual education, especially in non-Anglophone nations the fast spread of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) programs has been one of the twenty-first century's most noteworthy higher education (HE) trends (Aizawa & Rose, 2020). The rapid globalization and industrialization contribute to significantly towards the expansion of EMI (Dearden & Macaro, 2016). The concept of trilingual education is an evidence to the expansion of EMI and acts as a center to the entire discipline of multilingual education (Karabassova, 2020). In trilingual education three languages are taught as subjects and are used as medium of instruction during an appropriate number of teaching hours (da Silveira Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, n.d.). At present trilingualism has become established in the globalized world. However, the acknowledgment of trilingual education's significance has not been an instantaneous development. Nevertheless, according to Feng and Adamson 2014, it is only in the last twenty years trilingual education has stepped into the light with an increase in publications that transcend the bilingualism.

Kazakhstan is no exception in this global expansion and an example of a country where the language is solely spoken inside its boundaries; hence English in higher education is considered a means of internationalizing the country. The educational reforms “The trinity of Languages” in October 2006 by the Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan accentuated the significance of three languages: Kazakh, Russian, and English and led to the implementation of trilingual education in Kazakhstan (Tlemissov



et al., 2020)(Rakhymbayeva, 2022). The idea was to equip the new generation of Kazakhs with proficiency in three key languages: Kazakh (as the state language), Russian (as the language of interethnic communication), and English (as the language of successful integration into the global economy) (Polatova et al., 2020).

In this paper SLA and its intersection with the dynamics of EMI in higher education, focusing on the Kazakhstani context is discussed. The paper analyzes SLA objectives, individual characteristics, and sociocultural factors, providing a comprehensive understanding of the multilayered processes involved in acquiring a second language. Furthermore, the investigation extends to the realm of learning styles (LS), elucidating their definition, adaptation, and pivotal role in effective language teaching, offering practical insights for educators. Afterwards, the implementation of EMI in Kazakhstan, scrutinizing the educational reforms that underline trilingual education and addressing the challenges and opportunities inherent in this global pedagogical trend are highlighted by examining the perspectives of both students and teachers.

## **2. Learning Styles and Their Adaptation**

Learning Styles (LS) is defined as characteristic cognitive, affective and physiological behaviors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment (Vincent & Ross, 2001). The LS is a consistent way of functioning, that reflects underlying causes of behavior (Ellis, 1989) which can be regarded as consistent way learners acquire knowledge. However, Oxford (2011) argues that learning styles are not stable and rigid; they may vary according to a learning milieu or an activity and prone to be changed because they are not inherent traits but rather solid habits (Mercer et al., 2012). Reid (1987) first applied the concept of learning styles in language teaching and created an acclaimed questionnaire on learner style preference and distinguished five categories of learning styles such as kinesthetic, tactile, visual, auditory, and individual/group (Mercer et al., 2012).

## **3. Understanding the Role of Learning Styles in Language Teaching**

Several research have been done to categorize LS. However, there is very little empirical evidence on the role of learning styles on efficient learning. One of these few examples is the study by British linguist Rod Ellis. In this study to reveal the effect of learning styles on second language acquisition done by Ellis (1989), two students out of a sample of 39 students were observed. The results demonstrated that the first student is inclined to a formal studying, while the second one is more balanced and has the ability to work both formally and experimentally. It also revealed that the learning



style of a second student is more effective for language learning (Ellis, 1989). Nevertheless, Ellis (1989) claims short-term studies do not disclose the ultimate efficient learning style (Ellis, 1989). This study implies that either a student or teacher should adapt or that learners should be responsive to any kind of instruction. However, learner-adaptation bears some drawbacks, which include discomfort in the classroom, anxiety, and tension. Therefore, it can be argued that, a teacher is the one who should adapt instruction to appeal to students with different learning styles while students should be flexible and motivated to obtain knowledge.

Considering students' learning styles is beneficial for successful language teaching. According to the study by Diaz and Cartnal (1999), teachers have noticed for a long time up to now that each student tends to use his/her particular learning techniques (Diaz & Cartnal, 1999). Blackmore (1996) highlights that teachers should be familiar with the LS of students (Blakemore et al., 1992). Whereas Sarasin (1998) holds the view that due to the diversity of learning preferences among students, teachers should adapt their own instruction methods (binti Mohamad & bin Rajuddin, n.d.). The teachers need to identify whether their teaching materials and resources conform to the ways students learn and maximize the learning potential of each student. On the other hand, Diaz and Cartnal (1999) propose that reinforcement of students' less-preferred learning styles gives them space to turn into versatile learners and adjust to the requisites of the world (Diaz & Cartnal, 1999).

It can be recommended that Educators can implement extensive diversity of approaches to appeal to any type of learner. For instance, for visual learners, teachers should use visual aids such as flashcards, images games, videos, charts, and diagrams. In presentations, there should not be large blocks of text and main points should be colored and emphasized. As for auditory learners, teachers may suggest audiobooks if the reading is required and provide recordings of the lessons. In order to retain new information for kinesthetic learners, teachers can allow students to type instead of writing and ask them to design charts and diagrams to ensure their comprehension. As well as that, experiments, games, and other physical types of activities are useful to conduct. For social or group learners, it is best to study by collaborating with others. Solitary learners may be given individual problem-solving exercises and tasks. Once they feel comfortable during lessons, they might become less reluctant to group work. For the reason that each learner is unique and possesses different learning styles and routines, teachers can implement a mixture of all the previously mentioned strategies (Dunn & Griggs, 2000).

#### **4. Acquisition of English language in Kazakhstan through EMI phenomenon**

The educational reforms "The trinity of Languages" in October 2006 by the Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan accentuated the significance of three languages: Kazakh, Russian, and English and led to



the implementation of trilingual education in Kazakhstan (Tlemissov et al., 2020)(Rakhymbayeva, 2022). With the Acquisition of English as an SLA this policy aimed to offers a wide range of opportunities to the youth and new generation of Kazakhstan. Despite the wide range of opportunities and merits EMI offers to stakeholders in the context of Kazakhstan, there is an increasing concern over significant challenges and problems. According to Seitzhanova et al. (2015), EMI in Kazakhstan is characterized by various challenges and problems because it is still in a developing process (Seitzhanova et al., 2015).

The students' experiences and challenges, varying conceptualizations of the goal of EMI, varying provision of academic and language support, are still need to be understood through research at the micro level (Tajik et al., 2023). One significant problem is that students' inadequate linguistic competency makes it difficult for them to study and perform in a foreign language (Jimenez-Munoz, 2015). In Kazakhstan the first language is not English. Given that most students transfer from schools using Russian or Kazakh as their primary language of instruction to EMI, it is beneficial to investigate the underlying linguistic barriers that EMI students face in order to better understand and resolve these problems. Additionally, Jimenez-Munoz (2015) argues that the extensive and rapid adoption of English as a Medium of Teaching (EMI) in HE has necessitated altering the language of instruction without making any explicit adjustments to the curriculum design (Jimenez-Munoz, 2015). As well as that, as Wedin (2010) points out, the challenge for teachers and schools is to create bridges between everyday language and academic language, which is clearly not evident from the experience of Kazakhstani students (Wedin, 2010). Furthermore, it is important to understand how students perceive EMI since this can affect how they perceive the difficulties they have when learning a language (Kuteeva, 2020).

In the implementation of EMI the teachers' perceptions, experiences and beliefs of an EMI policy is a challenge (Dunn & Griggs, 2000) and the primary issue with EMI in Kazakhstan is that teachers who instruct in English are not adequately trained (Polatova et al., 2020). This is due to the fact that EMI in Kazakhstan is a relatively new development. This negatively influences student academic performance as they have inadequate language proficiency (Dearden, 2014). To overcome these challenges, students have to adopt LLSs, which according to Oxford (1990) is "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed" (Oxford, 1990). However, the scarcity of published literature and guidance in LLS system in EMI programs of demands further research work in the field.

It is anticipated that EMI will bring positive results in the long-term with already evident favorable aspects from a few studies done on EMI in Kazakhstan. Zenkova and Khamitova (2018) evaluated the



need for EMI in Kazakhstan and what steps are needed to succeed in its implementation, the opinions of stakeholders and policy-makers have been explored. The authors emphasize that in the context of multilingual education, English instruction is of the utmost importance at the university level (Zenkova & Khamitova, 2018). The study by Zenkova and Khmamitova (2018) revealed the potential benefits of EMI implementation for students, teachers, and universities as a whole. The most commonly cited advantages for students are: engagement in diverse international programs like Bolashak, pursuing a master's degree at a foreign university, and participating in international study placements and projects (academic and research-oriented). Additionally, they valued the chance to pursue further education abroad, including online learning opportunities, as well as the enhanced competitiveness of university graduates in the job market, offering a wide array of employment possibilities such as prestigious positions in foreign and transnational corporations. (Zenkova & Khamitova, 2018). According to some informants in the study, EMI practice will broaden students' perspectives, foster personal growth, and improve their professional English language competence. One individual believes that studying a requisite topic in English allows a student to become bilingual, while another believes that learning in English is a sign of superior education.

In addition to the above mentioned, EMI has a positive impact on teachers. Bekbauova et al. (2017) report that teaching subjects in English will be beneficial. They claim that English instruction would benefit instructors' careers by raising their ranking and allowing for external academic mobility and labour migration to developed nations. They also stressed that for English-medium education, teachers would need to prepare for their lectures using expert literature published in English, which would improve their professional capabilities and the quality of teaching materials. It would also increase teaching staff enthusiasm to engage in a variety of international programs, including grant programs and internships, and motivation to write scientific articles for high-impact journals. Moreover, instructors would feel more confident if they practiced English-medium teaching since it would improve their English language skills and, as a result, the quality of their professional interactions with international colleagues (Bekbauova et al., 2017).

## 5. Conclusion

The study explored second language acquisition and individual influencing factors. Further, it discusses the findings, which emerged from the empirical analyses of learning style impact on learning and teaching strategies. In addition the study emphasizes on the acquisition of English language in Kazakhstan through EMI phenomenon, opportunities and challenges. For the study it can be concluded that:



- Learning styles, defined as cognitive, affective, and physiological behaviors, play a crucial role in how individuals perceive and respond to the learning environment. While the stability of learning styles is debated, adapting teaching strategies to accommodate diverse styles can contribute to successful language teaching.
- In the context of Kazakhstan, the trilingual education policy reflects the global trend of EMI expansion. However, challenges such as linguistic competence, teacher training, and curriculum alignment need attention.
- Despite concerns, the study highlights the potential long-term benefits of EMI, including international opportunities for students and professional growth for teachers. It underscores the need for comprehensive approaches to cater to various learning styles, ensuring effective language acquisition and successful EMI implementation in higher education.
- For the full implementation of EMI in Kazakhstan and similar nations dynamic, adaptive educational framework is recommend. Only through a nuanced understanding of individual differences, coupled with strategic pedagogical adjustments, can we optimize language acquisition and foster successful EMI implementation in higher education. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the EMI models in bilingual nations.





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