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REGIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY IN KAZAKHSTAN.
CASE OF TURKESTAN REGION¹

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Abstract: *The aim of this article is to identify the specific features of the language situation and language policy in Turkestan region, compare it to other regions in this respect and determine the impact of these features on the prospects for the development of language policy in Kazakhstan as a whole. To achieve that, various data sources were analyzed, including ethno-demographic statistics and materials from local authorities responsible for language policy, as well as the results of mass surveys and focus groups. The study reveals that, despite the dominance of the Kazakh language, the region has a multilingual system supported by educational and cultural institutions. This allows the region to achieve the goals of the Concept of Language Policy Development in Kazakhstan for 2023–2029, which primarily focuses on the development of the Kazakh language and transition to the Latin alphabet. At the same time, the authors identify challenges related to the Concept's insufficient attention to the region's multilingual nature and the generally neutral-to-negative attitude of its residents towards the use of the Latin alphabet. The study's findings and conclusions highlight the shortcomings of the proposed Concept and suggest several ways to overcome them using the existing experience of multilingual educational and cultural institutions. The originality of this work lies in its ability to address applied language construction tasks while also revealing the weaknesses of theoretical arguments that multilingualism in the post-Soviet countries hinders the development of ethnic identity and weakens intercultural communication.*

Keywords: language situation, specifics of a multilingual region, factors of language policy

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Language policy is an important part of state building, thus, it is no coincidence that throughout the entire period of Kazakhstan's independence, it was in the center of attention for the authorities and society. All its significant milestones were accompanied by stormy discussions. This situation is due to the complex processes of changing the status of Kazakh, Russian and other languages spoken by the inhabitants of the country over the past 30 years. According to the researchers, “the

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Kazakh language is one of the foundations of the Kazakhstani statehood and state support for the Kazakh language meets the strategic interests of Kazakhstan. At the same time, preservation of the Russian language's domains is ensured and supported by Kazakhstan's desire for integration processes, preservation of a single cultural and educational space" with neighboring countries [Suleimenova, 2005, p. 284]. Not without reason, the goal of "State Program for Development and Functioning of Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011–2020" [*State Program*, 2011], adopted by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan from June 29, 2011, was a harmonious language policy that ensured comprehensive functioning of the state language as the most important factor in strengthening national unity while preserving the languages of all ethnic groups living in the country.

In June 2023, following an open online discussion, the "Concept of Language Policy Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023–2029" was adopted, which outlines, among other objectives, the "Main Directions for the Transition to the Latin Script" [*Concept of Development*, Chapter 2, Paragraph 2, 2023], indicating the government's advancing plans in this regard. On October 19, 2023, this Concept was approved [*Kazakhstan Approves the Concept*, 2023], and by 2029, the following key outcomes are expected as a result of its implementation: 1. Proportion of the Kazakh-speaking population in the republic – 84%; 2. Proportion of the population speaking three languages – 32%; 3. Proportion of the population enrolled in courses on the new alphabet and spelling rules – 15%; 4. Proportion of documentation by central state and local executive bodies written in the state language – 94%; 5. Proportion of the terminology based on the spelling rules of the Kazakh language's Latin alphabet (cumulative) – 40% [*Concept of Development*, Chapter 6, 2023].

It is evident that among the objectives of the program, no languages other than Kazakh are mentioned (one can infer that one of the three languages referred to in the program is Russian, alongside Kazakh and English). Furthermore, of the five objectives, two specifically address the new Latin alphabet. Prior to this, for 30 years after independence, Kazakhstan has pursued a flexible and soft language policy, which proclaimed gradual expansion of the scope of application of the Kazakh language, but safeguarded the possibility to use Russian, Uzbek, Uyghur and Tajik comfortably. It is evident that the direction of language policy has now shifted.

The presence of two large linguistic communities (Kazakh and Russian) in the country brings the situation in Kazakhstan closer to the situation in many regions around the world where such communities emerged as a result of the disintegration of larger states, sometimes in a colonial context. This primarily pertains to the post-Soviet states that share historical and cultural conditions similar to those of Kazakhstan over the past 100 years. It also applies to countries like Canada and Singapore, which were formed at different times as a result of the dissolution of the British Empire.

Existing researches have more frequently focused on the linguistic situation in the post-Soviet Baltic states, where the influence of a significant Russian-speaking minority on the processes of establishing a new national identity has been examined. Some researchers viewed the existence of a large number of Russian speakers as a potential threat for conflicts or even the formation of a new post-Soviet ideology. This perspective was articulated by Inesse Ozolina in her article "Language Use and Intercultural Communication in Latvia" [Ozolina, 1999, p. 11–12] and by Cemile Asker, who compared the situation in Kazakhstan to Estonia. In both cases, the authors advocated for the existence of only one (state) language, which they considered to be the titular language [Asker, 2014, p. 76–77].

Other researchers argue that a multifaceted [Cheskin, Kachyevski, 2019, p. 15] language policy is more justified in Kazakhstan, as it allows for the preservation of the linguistic and ethnic identity of the titular population while also avoiding the alienation of minorities, particularly

the significant Russian-speaking population in Kazakhstan [Reagan, 2019, p. 467]. Official bilingualism and multilingualism are also supported in Canada and Singapore, which have developed in a post-colonial context rather than a post-Soviet one. In Canada, the language policy is aimed at supporting two official languages – English and French [*Action Plan*, Pillar 3, 2023]; in Singapore, along with 3 local languages, English, the language of the former metropolis, was approved as the official language [Kuo, 1983, p. 2; Dixon, 2005, p. 625–626].

At the same time, researchers have noted that in Kazakhstan, the number of schools with non-Kazakh language of instruction gradually decreased [Fierman, 2006, p. 102–106; Savin, 2019, p. 96–101] against the backdrop of declining Russian-speaking population and the increasing role of Kazakh as a symbol of nation-building after the Soviet period, which was declared colonial. However, there have not yet been any studies dedicated to the language policy of Kazakhstan after 2019, focused on the situation in a particular region.

Some authors have repeatedly noted the importance of taking into account regional specifics when analyzing language policy and language planning in Kazakhstan. In particular, A. Zhikeyeva, believing that “differences in the linguistic situation of individual regions: north and south, border regions are generally recognized”, admits that many regional facets of language policy remain out of the academic scope. In her opinion, “the peculiarity of the linguistic situation of northern Kazakhstan lies in the presence of a Kazakh-Russian bilingualism of a special kind, namely, the predominance of Russian language among the entire population as the language of interethnic communication”. In this regard, the researcher believes, “there is an urgent need for a region-based approach in studying the language situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan” [Zhikeyeva, 2014, p. 3].

Meanwhile, Turkestan region is not only one of the most densely populated in the country, but also the most dynamic in terms of population growth. Since the goal of any language policy is to promote internal unity and sustainable development of the country, the purpose of this article is to study the specifics of the language situation and language policy in Turkestan region in the context of opportunities and challenges during the implementation of the Concept of Language Policy Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023–2029.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks need to be accomplished:

1. Study the overall picture of the ethno-linguistic situation in Turkestan region through the lens of official statistics and materials from state and public institutions responsible for language development and ethno-cultural diversity.
2. Identify the perception of the current language situation and language policy among different categories of the region's residents and their readiness to achieve the goals set forth in the Concept of Language Policy Development.
3. Determine the areas of the language policy that appear most problematic and least effective in the eyes of the local population, and prepare recommendations for central and regional authorities responsible for implementing language policy that could enable effective intercultural communication between ethnic communities and authorities.

Since the authors have many years of experience conducting similar studies in the region [Junusbayev et al., 2017], this experience was utilized to prepare the present study. To ensure comprehensive examination of the language situation in the region, methodological approaches from various disciplines were employed.

1. The ethno-demographic situation was studied using several methods: analyzing current statistical materials and data from the 2021 National Census, interpretation of statistics of education departments, documents of language policy makers and authorities in various districts of the region. In particular, we studied the ethnic composition of individual settlements, the language of instruction in schools located in these settlements, reports on the activities of language

development departments in different districts and villages, instructions on the implementation of language politics and introduction of Latin alphabet for educational and cultural institutions issued by local authorities. The period from 2022 to 2024 was covered.

2. Public opinion was studied through a population survey. A total of 1000 respondents were surveyed, predominantly young individuals, as they are expected to become the primary participants in the future changes and actions under the Concept of Language Policy Development. The questionnaires were proportionally distributed according to a representative sample based on gender and ethnicity among urban and rural areas of the region.

As it has been already noted, in October 2023, the “Concept of Language Policy Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023–2029” was adopted [*Concept of Development*, 2023]. The objectives of this concept were markedly different from the language planning tasks proclaimed in President K.-J. Tokayev’s address to the people of Kazakhstan, along with the thesis that “the role of the Kazakh language as the state language will be reinforced and the time will come when it will become the language of interethnic communication”, there are assurances to continue creating “conditions for development of languages and cultures of all ethnic groups in our country” [*Message of the Head of the state Kassym-Jomart Tokayev*, 2019]. Thus, marking the changes associated with increased attention to the tasks of modernizing the Kazakh language and expanding its dissemination, the Concept contains very few mentions of development plans for other languages of Kazakhstan.

This is directly stated in the text of the Program itself, where, with reference to the data of “Public Opinion” research institute, it is stated that in 2018 the share of the population who speaks the state language was 85.9%, and the share of the population who speaks Russian was 92.3% [*State Program*, 2020]. Specifying the features of the current situation, the authors of the Program note that “at present, the following language competencies exist in Kazakhstan: Kazakh-speaking; Kazakh-Russian bilingualism; Russian-speaking; ethnic-Kazakh, ethnic-Russian bilingualism or ethnic-Russian-Kazakh trilingualism; Kazakh-Russian-English trilingualism”. At the same time, “the predominance of Russian-Kazakh bilingualism in the linguistic environment” is stated as a problem (in the same place). Therefore, it is not accidental that the attention to the expansion of the Kazakh language has increased in recent years.

Considering the distribution of the ratio of those who speak and do not speak the Kazakh language in the population of various regions of the country (See Table 1), it is easy to conclude that the patterns of the spread of language competencies depend on regional specifics. It is obvious that in the regions where, according to the 2021 census, the share of those who speak Kazakh was more than 90% (Aktobe, Atyrau, Kyzylorda, Mangistau, Turkestan regions), completely different language competencies will dominate than in those areas where this indicator was 45–60% (Akmola, Karaganda, Kostanay, Pavlodar, North Kazakhstan) (fig. 1)². According to the differences in language situation, regional language policies should take into account needs and demands of speakers of different languages in a particular locality.

Table 1. Number and share of citizens who speak and do not speak the state language by regions of Kazakhstan

	speak state language, people	do not speak, people	speak state language, %	do not speak, %
Kazakhstan	13 768 408	3 426 306	80.08	19.9
Akmola region	459 730	263 559	63.6	36.4

² For figs. 1–2, see color insert.

Aktobe region	727 039	77 576	90.4	9.6
Almaty region	1 651 365	268 856	85.9	14.1
Atyrau region	56 3591	26 119	95.6	4.4
West Kazakhstan region	507 363	1026 85	83.2	16.8
Zhambyl region	925 551	140 579	86.8	13.2
Karaganda region	774 693	460 468	62.7	37.3
Kostanay region	407 727	368 342	52.5	47.5
Kyzylorda region	697 560	18 122	97.5	2.5
Mangistau region	593 942	38 524	93.9	6.1
Pavlodar region	453 789	244 739	64.9	35.1
North Kazakhstan region	231 096	275 607	45.6	54.4
Turkestan region	1 682 673	117 084	93.5	6.5
East Kazakhstan region	866 860	367 268	70.2	29.8
Astana city	965 975	130 325	88.1	11.9
Almaty city	1 424 551	392 337	78.4	21.6

Source: Made by the authors based on 2021 Population census.

It is clear that in the regions where proficiency in Kazakh is at around 50% of the total population, entirely different educational staff and methods for teaching Kazakh are needed, especially in the absence of a stable Kazakh-speaking environment.

Turkestan region provides us with a unique example of a situation where dominant Kazakh language teachers could help students learning in schools that do not use Kazakh as the language of instruction. Let us examine how this is implemented in practice.

Currently, the language situation in Turkestan region reflects the ethnic composition of the population, which is dominated by Kazakhs (75% of all residents of the region) and 93% of the population speaks Kazakh. Accordingly, the lion's share of the document flow is carried out in Kazakh, education in 742 out of 1000 schools in the region is conducted in Kazakh exclusively. 8 schools use Russian as the sole language of instruction and only one uses Uzbek. In the remaining 249 schools, education is conducted in two languages, more often in Kazakh/Uzbek and Kazakh/Russian. 12 schools use Kazakh/Tajik. At the same time, the region can be divided into several zones, which differ according to the share of the Kazakh population, prevalence of the Kazakh language in schooling and everyday speech behavior.

Table 2. Number and share of the largest ethnic communities in the population of cities and districts of Turkestan region as of January 1, 2023

	Kazakhs		Uzbeks		Tajiks		Russians	
	People	%	People	%	People	%	People	%
Turkestan region	1 595 151	75.2	378 463	17.8	38672	1.8	29 443	1.4
Turkestan city	145 641	66.2	68 340	31.1			1 603	0.7
Arys city	75 323	95.3					1 610	2.0
Kentau city	67 155	67.5	25 881	26.1			2 996	3.0
Baidibek district	46 867	95.8						

Zhetysay district	167 760	89.5	2 566	1.4	12 528	6.7	1 479	0.7
Keles district	122 830	91.8	7 337	5.5				
Kazygurt district	107 469	92.4	7 130	6.2				
Maktaaral district	89 942	69.6	12 003	9.3	15 430	11.9	1 916	1.5
Ordabasy district	121 485	95.1					1 093	0.9
Otrar district	50 699	98.2						
Sairam district	63 708	27.5	152 851	65.9			3 822	1.6
Saryagash district	188 604	86.1	7 201	3.2	9 278	4.2	2001	0.9
Sauran district	41 446	41.4		57.1				
Suzak district	57 168	90.1	4 741	7.5				
Tolebi district	83 050	68.7	22 331	18.4			5 285	4.4
Tyulkubas district	85 179	80.1	8 347	7.8			3 920	3.7
Shardara district	80 825	95.6					1 177	1.4
Shymkent	845 228	70.9	189 271	15.8	1 399	0.1	75 186	6.3

Source: Made by the authors based on current population statistics of Turkestan region.

Firstly, these are areas where the share of the Kazakh population reaches from 89 to 98% of all residents and the only language of instruction in most schools, everyday and industrial communication, document flow is the state language. These are Baidibek, Zhetysay, Keles, Kazygurt, Ordabasy, Otrar, Suzak, Shardara districts and Arys city. A small number of schools with Uzbek language of instruction exist only in Zhetysay (1), Keles (1), Kazygurt (4) districts; also, in Zhetysay district there are 3 schools with Tajik language of instruction.

Secondly, there are areas in which the share of the Kazakh population amounts to 68 to 86%. Along with the dominance of Kazakh in some sectors, other languages are publicly used: Russian, Uzbek, Tajik. These include Maktaaral, Saryagash, Tolebi, Tyulkubas districts (fig. 2). In Maktaaral district, there are 3 schools with Uzbek language of instruction and 5 schools where, along with Kazakh, Tajik is also used in the learning process. In Saryagash district, there is 1 Uzbek-language school, 4 Tajik-language schools and 7 Russian-language schools. In Tolebi district, 5 schools teach in the Uzbek language, in Tyulkubas district – only one.

Finally, there are areas where the share of Kazakhs in the total population ranges from 27 to 66% and where, with the widespread use of Kazakh language, the role of Uzbek language is somewhat more noticeable, which inevitably makes adjustments to the implementation of language policy in these localities. These are Turkestan and Kentau cities, Sairam and Sauran districts, where most of the schools with Uzbek language of instruction in the region are located: from 42 in Sairam district and 19 in Sauran district to 11 in Turkestan and 6 in Kentau.

In Shymkent, the share of Kazakhs is 70.9% of the total population. Out of 245 schools, only one (non-state) school does not teach in the Kazakh language – classes are conducted in Russian. In 91 schools, only Kazakh is used in the learning process, in 117 – Kazakh and Russian, in 22 schools – Kazakh, Russian and Uzbek, in 14 – Kazakh and Uzbek³.

Thus, in about 26% of schools in Turkestan region and 62% in Shymkent, instruction takes place in languages other than Kazakh. Out of 249 000 students in the city's schools in 2023, 172 000 students (68.9%) studied in Kazakh, 58 000 students (23.4%) in Russian and 19 000 students (7.7%) in Uzbek. This implies the existence and maintenance of an appropriate

³ Data from Department of Education of Shymkent, included in the field materials of the authors.

infrastructure: education and advanced training of teachers working in different languages in the educational process, publishing textbooks in the relevant languages, adding supervisors for teachers working in the Russian, Uzbek and Tajik languages to the staff of education departments in some cities and districts.

In addition, the socio-demographic situation in Turkestan region can be considered model for the development of the language situation in Kazakhstan as a whole in the medium term: it is characterized by reduction in the Russian-speaking population and expansion of the representation of the Uzbek and Tajik population, which may become typical for some other regions of Kazakhstan in the coming decades.

In most districts of the region, the language of document circulation in state institutions, citizens' appeals, public events, court hearings, etc. is Kazakh. The Russian language is more often used in Shymkent, Sairam, Tolebi and Zhetysay districts in the fields of everyday communication, including among civil servants and educators.

Analyzing the situation in Turkestan region in light of the goals of the Concept of Language Policy Development for 2023–2029, the following observations can be made:

1. The dominance of teachers working in Kazakh could enable achieving a level of Kazakh language proficiency significantly above 84%, making this goal quite attainable.

2. The goal of having 32% of people proficient in three languages (Kazakh, English, and Russian) appears doubtful, as regular teaching in Russian occurs only in some cities of the region, and the Russian language instruction is at an adequate level. English language education and the use of English in teaching at schools or universities involve no more than 2–3% of students.

3. Training courses on the new alphabet for 15% of the population would be feasible only with significant increases in funding and the establishment of such courses in every educational institution. The prerequisites for this were established in 2019, but as of 2024, these centers are not operational.

4. Achieving the 94% rate of document circulation in Kazakh is quite attainable; it only requires creating the necessary conditions in schools where instruction is not conducted in Kazakh.

5. There are currently no grounds to expect a 40% increase in the terminological base, as there is hardly any Latin-alphabet literature available in schools and universities.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROSPECTS FOR THE CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE POLICY DEVELOPMENT FOR 2023–2029 AMONG RESIDENTS OF THE REGION (BASED ON POPULATION SURVEYS)

Most of 1000 respondents were aged between 18 and 45, reflecting the particular relevance of language policy initiatives for younger individuals who will experience the effects of transitioning the Kazakh language to the Latin script over the coming decades. For this reason, the sample was intentionally skewed in terms of education and employment: over 65% had higher education, and more than 75% were students or employees, as they are likely to be active consumers of language products for an extended period, making their perspectives particularly valuable for the research.

The ethnic composition of respondents mirrored the ethno-demographic proportions of Turkestan region's population: 70% were Kazakhs, 13% Russians, 9% Uzbeks, with the remaining respondents being Tatars, Tajiks, Azerbaijanis, Koreans, and Germans. Based on similar considerations, the majority of respondents were surveyed in urban areas, where visual information using various languages and graphic symbols is more prevalent and influential on the overall social situation.

In response to the question, “What language do you speak at home?” the majority of respondents expectedly chose Kazakh (64.6%), indicating that only a small portion of the Kazakh

population speaks a different language at home. At work, 56.4% speak Kazakh, and in the public sphere – 64%. These data suggest that Kazakh is the primary means of communication for the younger segment of society and is slightly less in demand in professional settings.

However, almost 50% of respondents noted that they sometimes feel discomfort due to insufficient knowledge of a particular language (Kazakh, Russian, Uzbek, English, etc.). This suggests an insufficient level of multilingualism development in society. Nevertheless, only about 10% of respondents frequently encounter such situations, indicating that this issue likely does not significantly affect the nature of language communication. Nonetheless, this is a significant indicator prevalence of which needs to be clarified through group discussions.

The majority of respondents (74.7%) would like their children to speak Kazakh, while 23.7 % prefer Russian. Predictably, more than 65.6% of respondents consider teaching their children Kazakh as the most important, 22.5% prioritize English, and 24.8% prioritize Russian (respondents could choose several answers). As we can see, the survey results confirm the correctness of the chosen direction of language policy aimed at promoting trilingualism in society, as these three languages are considered the most important for learning by the respondents. Additionally, 68% of respondents would prefer that documents in state and public institutions be in Kazakh, with only 17% choosing Russian. Among rural residents, the preference for the Kazakh language in different spheres of life is more pronounced.

The relevance of the data based on respondents' answers is confirmed by statistics from the language development departments, which indicate a sustained demand for studying Russian. This is evidenced by the stable number of classes with Russian as the language of instruction and the slow but steady increase in the number of people studying Russian in language centers.

Respondents' opinions varied significantly on the question, "Do you support the transition of the Kazakh language to the Latin script?" 19% and 26% respectively support it "completely" and "mostly", while 32% and 22% "rather do not support" and "do not support at all". Similarly, the distribution of responses to the question, "How important do you consider the transition to the Latin script for the country's development?" was mixed: 27% consider this transition "very important," 44% "not very important," and 25% "not important at all."

Assessments of the efforts of local authorities and public institutions in Turkestan region regarding the development of the state language, as perceived by respondents, are as follows: 18% of respondents are aware of such activities and have participated in them, 36.4% have heard of them, and 43.8% have not heard of such activities. A similar picture is observed regarding the development of other languages in the region: 20% are aware, 34% have heard something about it, and 44.9% have not heard anything at all. However, the efforts to promote the transition to the Latin script are even less known: 15% are aware, 35% are partly aware, and 49.7% are not aware at all.

The results of the mass survey show that the absolute majority of respondents consider the dominance of the Kazakh language in public, communicative, and educational spheres natural for the region and are oriented towards self-realization in such situation. Nevertheless, some respondents regularly experience discomfort due to a lack of knowledge of a particular language, indicating insufficient development of real multilingualism in all spheres of social life, which requires further study.

The preference for the Kazakh language does not imply the exclusion of other languages from use, as the demand for proficiency in these languages persists. This primarily concerns English and Russian, as well as the languages of the communities compactly residing in the region: Uzbek and Tajik.

A smaller portion of respondents consider the transition to the Latin script important for the country and are ready for it compared to those who think otherwise. The primary argument for

the “transition to the Latin script,” according to the study participants, is the “modernization of the Kazakh language,” which aligns with the main thesis of the government narrative on this matter. This circumstance creates an opportunity for a gradual shift in the position of the majority of respondents, provided that a gradual and unobtrusive explanatory effort is made, highlighting the advantages of using the Latin script for different categories of citizens.

Based on the research results, the readiness of state institutions and population to achieve the goals can be assessed as follows in the Concept of Language Policy Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023–2029:

- Primarily, this involves understanding the leading role of the Kazakh language in forming the linguistic environment in the region, indicating the feasibility of the set goal – 84% of the population speaking Kazakh.

- There are challenges in achieving the trilingualism level of 32%, requiring additional local efforts;

- There are conditions that may help to achieve the goal of 15% of individuals completing specialized courses on the use of the Latin alphabet; however, this goal is not guaranteed by the current level of interest.

- A majority of respondents expressed their readiness to use documents and official materials in the Kazakh language in their daily lives;

- The transition to the Latin script for the Kazakh language should be viewed as a years-long process, with the parallel use of the Kazakh language in Cyrillic in the public and educational spheres during the initial stages of the reform. This calls into question the possibility of achieving a 40% expansion of the terminological corpus using the Latin alphabet.

Key identified shortcomings and recommendations for their improvement:

1. The low effectiveness of teaching Kazakh to non-native speakers is primarily attributed, in our view, to the use of outdated methods centered around rote memorization of specific phrases and poems, and repetitive learning of dialogues disconnected from contemporary life circumstances. This issue affects both children in schools and adults in language centers. The practice of language teaching needs to more effectively incorporate new digital technologies that vividly and accessibly demonstrate the benefits of mastering Kazakh. It is also necessary to increase the number of centers for adult education in Kazakh, Russian, and English, and to raise teachers' salaries. Currently, the number of attendees is minimal, and the annual expansion rate of 1–2% is clearly insufficient to overcome the linguistic discomfort still prevalent in the region.

2. The relatively low level of readiness among the region's residents for the transition to the Latin script for the Kazakh language in the near future can be partially explained by a lack of extensive public discussions outside a narrow expert community. Events dedicated to language policy for the general public are usually conducted using arguments applicable to the entire country. However, there is a demand for discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of the Latin script from the perspective of the everyday needs of various categories of the population and individual citizens, rather than society as a whole. Holding such open discussions requires additional effort but would significantly increase the level of acceptance of the reform within the society. It may be necessary to utilize the experience of education development departments in certain districts of Turkestan region both regionally and nationally: introducing specialized consultants for the introduction of the Latin alphabet who would train school and language center teachers, similar to the existing consultants for Kazakh, Russian, Uzbek, and Tajik languages.

The findings of the study indicate that regional specificity is crucial both for the implementation of current language policy and for achieving the goals of the Concept of Language Policy

Development for 2023–2029. No other region in Kazakhstan has such high concentration of ethnic communities or such diverse range of schools, cultural institutions, and media in different languages. This allows for the identification of gaps in the new concept that need to be addressed to maintain multilingualism, facilitate intercultural communication, and strengthen internal societal cohesion as a condition for sustainable development. Furthermore, the experience of operating multilingual state and public institutions in the region will enhance the effectiveness of addressing new tasks, such as the implementation of the Latin alphabet, across the country. From a theoretical perspective, the study demonstrates that even 30 years after gaining independence, multilingualism traditions continue to support internal stability within society, contrary to some assumptions in the literature suggesting that multilingualism would hinder the development of national identity in the country.

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Fig. 1. Share of citizens who speak the state language by the regions of Kazakhstan.

Source: Made by the authors based on National Population Census 2021.

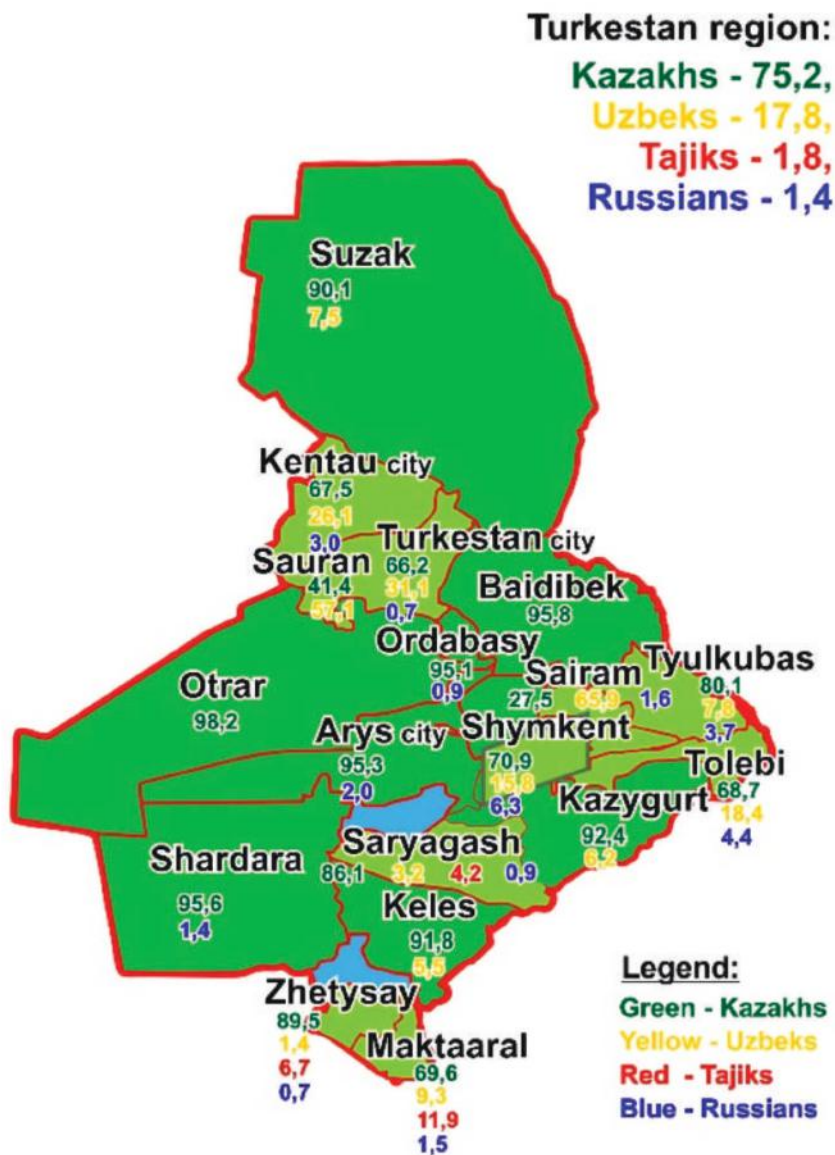


Fig. 2. Percentage of ethnic communities in the population of cities and districts of Turkestan region as of January 1, 2023. Source: Made by the authors based on current statistics of Turkestan region