

Language Education Issues in the Kazakh Community of Mongolia
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This presentation pertains to a national project concerning education for Kazakh children. The Kazakh live in the westernmost province of Mongolia. They have the right to study their own language. So the focus here, unlike in many other cases, is on the acquisition of the official national language, Mongolian. Kazakhs constitute 4.4% of the total population of Mongolia and occupy 3.6% of the territory. They have their own language, culture and set of traditions completely different from other Mongolians. They are also Muslims. Traveling in the Kazakh province, Mongolians would feel there are in a totally different country.

While the legal framework and provisions are all in place for minority children to learn Mongolian as well as maintain their culture and language, the gap between legislation and reality is quite pronounced. Because Kazakhs are permitted to teach in their own language, the Mongolian language standards are heavy for Kazakh children. Kazakh textbooks are brought over from Kazakhstan, but the content and context is not relevant for them. Teachers are trained locally, and teacher training colleges have Kazakh as medium of instruction, so their knowledge of Mongolian is limited. Kazakh teachers are trained in Kazakhstan and are unfamiliar with the Mongolian national standards. Further, the methodology is very teacher-centered: they teach only linguistic knowledge, no language skills. When students take national university exams, they don't understand the test materials due to low proficiency in the Mongolian language and perform poorly.

The Ministry of Education devised a project for innovating teaching methodology when teaching Mongolian: interactive, student-centered teaching, which was piloted for one school year. A foreign-language methodology is being used for teaching Mongolian, making it more competency-based and skills-based, not just a linguistic transfer. The bilingual education model has Kazakh as the language of learning in primary school. Oral Mongolian as well as Mongolian literacy is taught as well. In secondary, Mongolian becomes the language of instruction and Kazakh literature is taught alongside.

In teaching Mongolian, the learning cycle begins with knowledge construction, such as vocabulary and language structures. Grammar is not taught at this point. Then, guided practice leads students in listening, practicing and memorizing with language the things related to daily life. Students are encouraged to personalize the language by expressing themselves, for example: "I like this. I don't like that." This gradually brings on oral communication in Mongolian for which evaluation can take place.

In the community, Kazakh people seem to have a positive attitude to these changes. Kazakh provinces rank last in assessments, so they realize the need to improve their Mongolian language teaching. There are some people who don't think they need Mongolian or Kazakh. Those people planned to go to Kazakhstan, but interestingly, many of them came back. Most realize they need the Mongolian lessons and they are in fact Mongolian citizens.