

POSSIBILITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF AZERBAIJAN: ANALYSIS OF THE BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE AMONG STUDENTS' IN HIGHER PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The objective purpose of the present article examines the possibility of foreign languages in the education system of Azerbaijan: which analyses and determining the most preferred foreign language for this matter. Azerbaijan is a country with traditions of multilingualism.

This research was conducted using descriptive quantitative method involving 301 students from two private Universities as participant. The instruments used for this research study are questionnaire to identify whether foreign language is supported among students in Azerbaijan, and which foreign language is preferred most. Moreover, it was sought to examine the relationship among variables of gender, social class, existing language skills, as well as attitudes to the target language preference.

It was found that foreign language learning is supported by participants, and English is the most preferred foreign language. It indicates that multilingual societies like Azerbaijan are supportive of language acquisition choices that help preserve and develop multilingualism. Moreover, it was found that attitude to foreign language learning itself differ due to income level and existing language skills.

Keywords: the English language, examine, Azerbaijan, attitude, the best foreign language learning, multilingualism

INTRODUCTION

The article presents and evaluates the concept and importance of the relationship or even the difference between the foreign languages especially English and Russian at our country (Baku, Azerbaijan). Examine the best foreign language in the education system of Azerbaijan, and determining the most preferred target language is the aim of this article.

The article focuses on the research that was done to measure the best dominant foreign language among Higher Education Institutions. Also article adopted to analyze the effectiveness of learning foreign languages among students in the bilingual context.

All languages in the world are ideal. For each country for each human beings their own language is ideal. Moreover, in some conditions a target language become an ideal or even native language. Each language constantly changing in that case continuing need for adaptation is more normal. What you wanted to say and how you said it – between content and expression is called an ideal language (*Finnegan, 3rd edition*). Author agrees with this point that, language is a great way of identifying the cultural characteristics, nationality and become ideal. Changing social and intellectual needs may cause people's speaking in other languages. Even changing the living place means changing language but with mixed surrounding. So, the language depends on its place and situation.

Learning a foreign language and really putting it to work – that will make us stand out. Not only children but also animals; birds, cats, dogs can imitate the sounds and patterns which they hear around. Moreover, humans continue to imitate and practice these sounds and patterns until they form “habits” of correct language use. This plays an important role in future life. By making this as “habit” of correct language child will get success in language learning (*Smolinski, 1993*). The paragraph discusses that; the study of language cannot be equated with the study of history or math because more than understanding; it involves adapting to certain custom of a different social group.

As the paper investigates, the language is dominant and leader the research also shows that foreign language is special and most frequently used one. It is first necessary to understand the resources that a language makes available to its **native speakers**, those who have acquired it as children in a natural setting. Because communication is not restricted, language must do something more than provide a package of ready-made messages. Language is more than communication. Language must be **creative** – allowing novelty and innovation in response to new experiences, situations and thoughts. In nation building language is an essential factor. When the language is in decline, the identity of a nation is in decline too. As a result, each language has a deep historical background related to its nation.

Multilingualism in Azerbaijan

When we talk or discuss about learning, language planning, *the best foreign language*, especially about styles in Azerbaijan, it is impossible to talk or to give an example from Soviet times (*Ulkar Shafiyeva & Sara Kennedy, 2010*). Azerbaijan's nation and language have a long history. Surviving invasion by the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union, Azerbaijanis managed to preserve their national identity and native language. The period of seven decades under Soviet rule resulted in sociolinguistics problems for the country. The orthography of the Azerbaijani language was shifted to Cyrillic by the Russian Empire in 1939, close to the script of the Russian language. Notwithstanding all these pressures and stresses, Azerbaijani nation managed to preserve the national identity of its mother tongue, customs and traditions under Soviet rule.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan declared its independence from the Union. These years can be characterized as the times of nation building, language building, and reconstruction. During these years Azerbaijan has not only put forth a policy of improvement, but also as a young independent country has taken care of the ethnic minority languages within Azerbaijani borders.

Not surprisingly, Azerbaijan is the homeland of diverse ethno linguistic groups that speak languages of different family groups. According to the 1999 statistics in Azerbaijan, the minority groups were – Lezgins, constituting 2.2%, Russians 1.8%, Armenians 1.5%, Talysh 1.0%, Avar 0.6%, Tat 0.13%, Georgians 0.2%, Kurds 0.2%, Jews 0.1% and other nationalities 0.12% of the total population in Azerbaijan (Library of President. *The Population: 32*). These abovementioned ethnicities in Azerbaijan belong to the following language groups: North Caucasian, Indo-European, Afro-Asiatic and Kartvelian. According to the statistics of 1999, Lezgins were the biggest minority group in Azerbaijan. (*Balayev, 2007*).

In the contrast to the Soviet years, the minority nations were now given opportunities in their own languages. In 1992, article 6 of the 7th October law on Education and Article 3 of the state language law ensured the minority nations the rights and educational opportunities in their native tongues.

Nowadays, certain issues still remain in the improvement of the Azerbaijani language to be dominant. One of the current tasks on the paths toward language policy can be considered the need to decrease numerous Russian schools remaining as the part of the former Soviet Union “Russification” policy. Taking into account that, the numbers of Russian schools have not decreased in Azerbaijan nowadays, one may think that Russian has the same status as in the years of Soviet Union. According to the State Statistics Committee in Azerbaijani, the number of pupils attending state and private Russian schools was 108,240 pupils in the 2000-2001 year, and in the 2005-2006 years it constituted 108,737 pupils; moreover, beginning in the year 2006-2007 the number starts falling down to 108,257, while in 2009-2010 this figure is indicated to be 95,567 pupils (*State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan*). Taking into account the year 2009-2010, out of 1,260,600 pupils 95,567 pupils attended Russian state and private schools in Azerbaijan (*ibid.*).

Under Soviet rule, the Russian language played a role in nation building and as a language of policy. Russian was considered the state language along with Azerbaijani. Russian played the role of the lingua franca among 14 Soviet Union countries (including Russia, the Soviet Union countries numbered 15). The policy of the Soviet Union consisted of improvement of the Russian language among the union countries with the goal of gradually reaching the highest level, achieving Russophones in the union countries. However, according to the 1989 census 97.7 percent of Azerbaijan considered Azerbaijani their native and heritage tongue (*Grenoble, 2003*). Moreover, the majority of the elite consisted of Russophones. In 1959 in Azerbaijani 837 books were printed in Azerbaijan and 283 books were printed in Russia, while in 1979 the number of Azerbaijani books was 834 books (three books less than 1959), while Russian books numbered 430 books (147 books more than 1959) printed in Azerbaijan (*Balayev, 2007*).

In that time, during Soviet Union, foreign language didn't have any need. Moreover, Russian language wasn't as a foreign language. At schools the saying Russian sector was more used and it was as a second language. People wanted their children to know beside mother tongue the well-used Russian language. So, with learning and educating our literature and history the Russian history and literature was educated well. Well organized policy shown with such ruling. The value of Russian language was high despite the fact that Azerbaijani held the status of a state language. The people with lack of Russian knowledge were considered less modern.

Without a doubt, the importance of the Azerbaijani language has significantly increased within 21 years of independence. Instead, the Russian language is in the process of steadily shifting to a widely used L2 (second language) along with English language among the population. The status of the Russian language is decreasing; the importance of English language is increasing in comparative terms with decades before. From this standpoint, some scholars maintain Russian and English languages as a threat to the national purity and threat to the development of titular languages in Azerbaijan (*Pavlenko, 2008*). From authors point of view, the importance of Russian in Azerbaijan can decrease and transfer to the L2 spoken status, if the number of Russian schools would increase. The next logical step, where the government should make a gradual change, is the field of primary and secondary education sectors.

The author concluded that, the importance and scale of the Russian language and Russophone population in Azerbaijan has diminished, but not significantly disappeared. The importance of the English language as a foreign language increased after the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Moreover, Russian is still in use as a communication method rather than as a foreign language in the country. The amount of Russophone elites has diminished, but not disappeared. Among the growing generation, Azerbaijani is important. Moreover, there are still families that allow their children or grandchildren grow up in Russian. However, the improvement and enhancement of the language should be put into practice for the long term.

Overall, it can be said that, Azerbaijan has a relatively liberal linguistics setting with some signs of elite multilingualism. Moreover, in all cases population choose foreign language especially English for their better future conditions because, the modern life and modern circumstances make language wide use and much more demandable and also as a way of communication which is essential for better education, for better living, for better knowledge and even for better job. From that point learning a foreign language is so important and it will help fully establish Azerbaijani as the primary language of communication and facilitate the learning of desired languages on the other.

Previous Research

The study of gender is also one of the aspects that draw an attention in this research when it comes to attitude towards language learning in general. Wright (1999), Kobayashi (2002), Cenoz (2001) studies found significant differences between male and female attitude towards learning languages; girls demonstrated more positive attitude towards language learning compared boys. Cenoz (2001) and Merisuo-Storm (2007) found that achievement of students in second language learning depends on their attitude to a target language. The more positive attitude to foreign languages results in higher achievements of students in L2. Another similar research conducted by Papaja (2012), who studied the attitude of university students towards foreign language learning in Poland. On the national level, this paper represents a pioneering attempt to study the English language in Azerbaijan.

METHOD

Research Setting

The research site is considered among two private Universities; Khazar University and Qafqaz University in Baku, Azerbaijan. Both of them use English language as a second foreign language for instructions.

Khazar University was founded in 1991. It is a private educational institution for undergraduate, graduate and professional studies promoting advanced study and research, educational policy and development in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Survey at Khazar University was conducted on March 21st, 2015. Khazar was ranked first among Azerbaijan Universities according QS World University Rankings. Survey at Khazar University was conducted on March 10th, 2015. The sample students were selected randomly. 158 students questioned (n=158; female 96 (60.8%), male 62 (39.2%) mean age = 21 (86.1%))

Qafqaz University was founded in 1993, by decree of the Azerbaijani Republic's National Assembly and approval by the Cabinet of Ministers. In QS World University Rankings, it ranked second among Azerbaijani Universities

after Khazar University. Survey at Qafqaz University was conducted on April 21st, 2016. The sample students were selected randomly. 143 students questioned (n=143; female 63 (55.9%), male 80 (44.1%), mean age = 20 (86 %))

Research Questionnaire

The purpose of this investigation is to explore language planning, the best foreign language learning as second language in multilingual context. The questionnaire was self-developed by the author, who identified four main social factors (ethnic identity, age, sex, social class). According the distinct socio-linguistic group in Azerbaijan the survey questionnaire asks question on the language of secondary school, L1 acquisition in the Azerbaijani context. After the collection of data, answers were aggregated and codified for analysis. Furthermore, the study also examined among foreign language learners motivation and purpose. Following are the points that were studies:

1. Do you think is it necessary to learn a foreign language?
2. Which foreign language do you consider the best foreign language in Azerbaijan? 2a. Why?
3. Which foreign language do you know best? Circle the appropriate *number* from 1 to 8. (1-minimum \ 8-maximum)

See the Appendix A (Survey Questionnaire).

Sampling Method

This article focused its research on those people who are exposed to education and foreign languages. The data is quantitative and by one-way were analysis mean, mode, median, range, variance, standard deviation (SD), z-score and t-score.

The survey was conducted from 2015-2016 academic years for the purpose to determine the prevalence of the best foreign language. Students in various majors within the research sample were stratified through stratified sampling. Students with different majors for the conducted research were randomly selected. Participants involved in this study were 301 people from two private educational institutions (Khazar University and Qafqaz University) in Azerbaijan. These participants were purposively selected due to their interest being multilingual. The ages of the participants varied between 18 and 29. Survey questions were prepared in paper and distributed to each person personally. Ethical considerations of the research were taken into account: participants at the survey were voluntary; the participants were informed about the research and the future fate of the questionnaires.

Participants

Undergraduate students from two private educational institutions (Khazar University, Qafqaz University) participated at this survey.

Table 1. Observed frequencies: Gender

Gender of data	Valid number & percent
Male \0	171
including,	
Khazar University	62 (39.2)
Qafqaz University	80 (55.9)
Female \1	130
including,	
Khazar University	96 (60.8)
Qafqaz University	63 (44.1)
Total	301
Mean age (SD)	21 (86.0)

Totally, 301 valid responses were registered (female 159, male 142, mean age = 21, SD = 86.0) (See Table 1).

Data Analysis

IBM® SPSS® Statistics Data Editor (version.23) was used to conduct statistical analyses.

FINDINGS

Findings of statistical analyses on students’ attitude to the best foreign language among two Higher Private Institutions (Khazar and Qafqaz University) in Azerbaijan are presented below.

Table 2. Observed frequencies: Age

Age of data	frequency	valid percent
Khazar University		
18-21 (0)	136	86.1
22-25 (1)	20	12.7
26-29 (2)	2	1.3
Missing	0	158
Total	158	100.0
Qafqaz University		
18-21 (0)	123	86.0
22-25 (1)	17	11.9

26-29 (2)	3	2.1
Missing	0	143
Total	143	100.0

The descriptive statistics tests revealed that the mean age (.1519), Std. Deviation (.39386), Variance (.155), and Range (2.00) for Khazar University. For Qafqaz University the mean age (.1608), Std. Deviation (.42211), Variance (.178) and Range (2.00) (See Table 2).

Table 3. Observed frequencies: Question 1. Do you think is it necessary to learn a foreign language (FL)?

Category	frequency	valid percent
Khazar University		
Yes (0)	155	98.1
No (1)	3	1.9
Missing	0	158
Total	158	100.0
Qafqaz University		
Yes (0)	136	95.1
No (1)	7	4.9
Missing	0	143
Total	143	100.0

The descriptive statistics tests revealed for question 1, that the mean (.1090), Std. Deviation (.13691), Variance (.019) and Range (1.00) for Khazar University. For Qafqaz University the mean (.0490), Std. Deviation (.21652), Variance (.047) and Range (1.00). The majority of participants answered YES. Out of 301 students 291 answered YES for necessity of learning a foreign language, 10 students indicated NO for the necessity of learning a foreign language. (see Table 3).

Table 4. Observed frequencies: Question 2. Which foreign language do you consider the best FL for Azerbaijan?

Category	frequency	valid percent
Khazar University		
English (0)	146	92.4
Russian (1)	7	4.4
Other (2)	5	3.2
Missing	0	158
Total	158	100.0
Qafqaz University		
English (0)	126	88.1
Russian (1)	10	7.0
Other (2)	7	4.9
Missing		
Total	143	100.0

The descriptive statistics tests revealed for question 2, that the mean (.1076), Std. Deviation (.40040), Variance (.160) and Range (2.00) for Khazar University. For Qafqaz University the mean (.1678), Std. Deviation (.48912), Variance (.239) and Range (2.00). The majority of participants preferred English. Out of 301 students 272 indicated English as the most preferred foreign language, 17 students indicated Russian as preferred, 12 students favored other language. (see Table 4).

Table 5. Observed frequencies: Question 3. Which foreign language do you know best?

Category	frequency	valid percent
Khazar University		
English (0)	127	80.4
Russian (1)	28	17.7
Other (2)	3	1.9
Total	158	100.0
Qafqaz University		
English (0)	131	91.6
Russian (1)	4	2.8
Other (2)	8	5.6
Missing		
Total	143	100.0

The descriptive statistics tests revealed for question 3, that the mean (.1076), Std. Deviation (.40040), Variance (.160) and Range (2.00) for Khazar University. For Qafqaz University the mean (.1678), Std. Deviation (.48912), Variance (.239) and Range (2.00). Students enrolled in private universities were more likely indicated as the best known language English. Out of 301 students 258 indicated English, 32 indicated Russian and 11students indicated as the best known language other. (see Table 4).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the main findings of the study, which are based on the results of the survey conducted to the students' in two Higher Private Educational Institutions. The research findings revealed a significant support of foreign language and indicated that English is the most preferred foreign language in Azerbaijan. These findings add further evidence to the existing literature that second language learning is feasible in multilingual settings. An overwhelmingly strong preference for English in Azerbaijan, where 90% of the population is bilingual in Russian

and Azerbaijani, adds new knowledge to the fact that bilingualism is thought to be not only beneficial for helping to acquire a third language, but also positively affects attitudes to learning of a third language in general. Moreover, there was a statistically significant relationship between L1 and the attitude to language learning. Although both linguistics groups (Azerbaijani and Russian speakers), were supportive of English, the level of support among Azerbaijani speakers was higher. This study did not find relationship between gender and attitude towards foreign language learning among male and female learners.

The data collected on social class and income level was limited due to local circumstances as explained above, and findings should be interpreted cautiously. The analysis did not find statistically significant relationship with the variable of ownership form of the educational institutions, which acted as proxy for social class. Students from private universities supported foreign language learning almost on the same level. Students enrolled in public universities were more favorable towards English.

The strong relationship between the attitudes to English language deserves attention. Supporters of English language more likely (90 %), those who did not support English language (10%). The obtained statistical significance sheds some new light on theories of the relationship between the language of education and second/foreign language acquisition, and attitude. Research suggests that, attitudes to language acquisition depend on attitudes towards the second/foreign language community, target language and language learning. Moreover, L1 seems to be one of the important elements that affects attitude of learners towards English.

Future research would be useful to examine the reasons of observed significant relationship between L1 and the attitudes to English to find out whether multilingual persons are less willing to learn and additional language than monolinguals do or that receiving education in Russian affects the attitude to English in the Azerbaijani context.

Overall, the findings suggest that multilingual societies such as Azerbaijan generally support language-learning approaches that help preserve and enhance multilingualism. This finding reinforces the concept put forward by Merisuo-Storm, (2007), who found that multilingual people are open to learn additional languages. Such a strong support for foreign language learning brings new space for maneuvering for decision makers in language policy and planning, for which the question of which language is paramount importance. The research draws on the human ability to learn more than one language and makes the question of “which single language” redundant. For such language policies, public support is an important factor and it is evidently present in Azerbaijan as it can be inferred from this study. The possibility of Russian is conditioned by the availability of resources, geographical, social, and political factors. The role of English is underpinned by its role as the global lingua-franca, and the strong positive attitude to this language among the population as the findings from this work indicate.

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Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire (Original)

This survey questionnaire is made for the purposes of research by Valida Karimova, (PhD (c.) on Germanic languages).		
The aim of the research is to find out the best foreign language among students' in the Higher Private Education Institutions.		
<i>Ethics: Participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to respond this questionnaire without any negative consequences. Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential, and no information that could reveal your identity will be used.</i>		
Possibility of Foreign Languages in the Education System of Azerbaijan: Analysis of the best foreign language among students' in Higher Private Educational Institutions.		
Name		
Surname		
Affiliated education institute		
Gender	Male <input type="checkbox"/>	Female <input type="checkbox"/>
Age	18-21 <input type="checkbox"/>	22-25 <input type="checkbox"/>
		26-29 <input type="checkbox"/>

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	
1. Do you think is it necessary to learn a foreign language?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
2. Which foreign language do you consider the best foreign language in Azerbaijan?	English <input type="checkbox"/> Russian <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
2a. Why?	
3. Which foreign language do you know best? Circle the appropriate <i>number</i> from 1 to 8. (1-minimum \ 8-maximum)	
English	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧
Russian	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧
Other (please specify)	① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧