

**Charting ethnic Kazakh returnee students' journey through Community of Practice  
in Kazakhstan**

Ainur Dukenova

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Multilingual Education

Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education

June, 2019

Word count: 20 020

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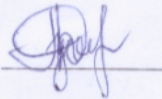
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### Abstract

The concept of Community of Practice (CoP) plays a central role in shaping the dynamics of members' participation within a community; particularly new members' transition from periphery to full participation in a new CoP. Additionally, the CoP framework highlights the need to consider the power members of host community exercise in both supporting and challenging newcomers' journey of participation. This study applies the framework of CoP to explore the journey of participation undertaken by returnee students from China in a new environment of Kazakhstan. Specifically, the research is aimed to address the following questions: i. How does the linguistic backgrounds of returnee students influence their level of participation in a new CoP in Kazakhstan?; ii. How do returnee students identify themselves as members of a new CoP and what membership identities are ascribed to them by old members?; iii. What are additional factors that promote returnee students' transition towards full participation in a new environment? The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research approach comprising individual semi-structured interviews with six returnee students in one university located in the Eastern Region of Kazakhstan. The data was subjected to an iterative thematic analysis informed by the CoP framework. The analysis revealed that returnee students' transition from the periphery to the core is a multilayered process. Their journey of participation from peripheral to full participation in academic and social domains is shaped by language constraints encountered in three languages—Kazakh, Russian and English. In addition, returnee students' transition from marginal to core membership in their new CoP is both impeded and supported by the identities ascribed to returnee students by old members such as teachers, local students and other community members. Finally, the study identified other factors that support returnee students' journey towards core membership including the support offered by older members of the new CoP, i.e. more-experienced returnee students,

teaching staff, university administration. The findings imply that gaining deeper understanding of returnee students' participation would enable university and teaching staff to foster returnee students' participation and engagement in academic and social settings.

## Аңдатпа

**Қытайдан келген қазақ студенттерінің Тәжірибе Қауымдастығы арқылы қатысу жолдарын зерттеу**

Қоғамдастықтағы мүшелердің қатысу динамикасын қалыптастыруда Тәжірибе қауымдастығы (ТҚ) тұжырымдамасы маңызды рөл атқарады; әсіресе, жаңа мүшелердің перифериядан толық қатысуға көшуі. Және де, ТҚ тұжырымдамасы бойынша қабылдаушы елдің тәжірибелі мүшелері жаңадан келгендердің қатысуын қолдауна немесе қолдамауына әсер етеді. Қытайдан келген қазақ студенттерінің Қазақстанның жаңа ортасына қатысу жолдарын зерттеу үшін Тәжірибе Қауымдастығы тұжырымдамасы қолданылды. Нақтырақ айтқанда, зерттеу келесі мәселелерді шешуге бағытталған: i. Қытайдан келген студенттердің тілдік ортасы жаңа қоғамдастыққа қатысу деңгейіне қалай әсер етеді?; ii. Қытайдан келген студенттер өзін жаңа қауымдастықтың мүшелері ретінде қалай таныстырады?; және iii. Қытайдан келген студенттердің жаңа ортаға толық қатысуна қандай қосымша факторлар әсер етеді? Зерттеу барысында Шығыс Қазақстанның университеттерінің бірінде оқитын алты Қытайдан келген қазақ студенттері қатысқан жеке жартылай құрылымдық сұхбатқа негізделген сапалы феноменологиялық зерттеу әдісі қолданылды. ТҚ тұжырымдамасы бойынша деректер итеративті тақырыптық талдаумен жүргізілді. Талдау көрсеткендей, репатриант студенттердің перифериядан толық қатысуға көшуі көп қабатты процесс болып табылады. Академиялық және әлеуметтік салаларында осы студенттердің перифериядан толық қатысуына көшуі қазақ, орыс және ағылшын тілдерінде тілдік шектеулермен байланысты. Сонымен қатар, жаңа қауымдастықтың мүшелерінің ішінде мұғалімдер, жергілікті студенттер және қауымдастықтың өзге мүшелері репатриант студенттердің маргиналдыдан



толық қатысуға көшуінің қолдауына немесе қолдамауына әсер етеді. Ақырында, зерттеу барысында ескі ТҚ-ның мүшелері, яғни басқа тәжірибесі мол репатриант студенттері, профессорлық-оқытушылар құрамы, университет әкімшілігінің қолдауы репатриант студенттердің толық қатысуына көмектеседі. Зерттеулер қорытындысы бойынша, білім оқу орындары басшылығының және білім беру қызметкерлерінің осы студенттердің қатысуын жақсы түсінуіне және академиялық пен әлеуметтік ортасына толық қатысуын қамтамасыз етеді.

## Аннотация

### **Прослеживание пути студентов-репатриантов через концепцию Сообщество Практики в Казахстане**

Концепция Сообщество Практики (СоП) играет центральную роль в определении траектории движения членов внутри сообщества, в особенности перемещения новых участников с периферийного положения в полноправное членство. Кроме того, в рамках СоП подчеркивается необходимость учитывать деятельность более опытных членов принимающего сообщества в поддержке или препятствовании пути перемещения новичков. Это исследование использовало данную концепцию, чтобы изучить пути участия студентов репатриантов, вернувшихся из Китая, в новой среде Казахстана. В частности, исследование направлено на решение следующих вопросов: i. Как языковая среда студентов репатриантов влияет на их уровень участия в новом СоП?; ii. Как студенты-репатрианты идентифицируют себя в качестве участников нового СоП и как другие члены нового сообщества идентифицируют этих студентов?; and iii. Какие существуют дополнительные факторы, способствующие переходу студентов-репатриантов к полноценному участию в новой среде? В исследовании используется качественный феноменологический метод исследования, включающий индивидуальные полуструктурированные интервью с шестью студентами-репатриантами одного университета, расположенного в Восточном регионе Казахстана. Данные были подвергнуты итеративному тематическому анализу в соответствии с концепцией СоП. Анализ показал, что перемещение студентов с периферийного к полноправному участию имеет многослойную структуру. Путь участия новичков от периферии к центру деятельности сообщества в академической и социальной сферах определяется языковыми ограничениями на казахском, русском и английском языках. Кроме того, передвижение репатриантов

от маргинального к центральному участию в новом сообществе затрудняется или поддерживается идентичностями, приписываемыми репатриантам старыми участниками, такими как учителя, местные студенты и другие члены сообщества. Наконец, в ходе исследования были выявлены другие факторы, которые поддерживают путь студентов-репатриантов к центральному участию, включая поддержку, предлагаемую более опытными членами старого СоП, то есть более опытными студентами-репатриантами, преподавательским составом, администрацией университета. Полученные данные подразумевают более глубокое понимание участия студентов – репатриантов, позволяющее университетскому и преподавательскому составу стимулировать и повысить участие студентов-репатриантов в академической и социальной жизни.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1997 an estimated 4,5 million ethnic Kazakhs lived outside their homeland (Mendikulova, 1997); they are descendants of those who were forced to leave the territory of Kazakhstan during 1920-1930s because of starvation, repression, collectivization and other political issues and consequences emanating from the Soviet Union governance (Bokayev, 2013). Since its independence in 1991, the Republic of Kazakhstan has launched a repatriation program, giving an opportunity for these returnees to come back to their historical homeland. From 1991 to 2015, 952 882 ethnic Kazakhs have returned to Kazakhstan (MLSPP, 2015). The vast majority of repatriates came from Uzbekistan (60 %), followed by Mongolia (13.4 %), China (10.4 %), Turkmenistan (7.7 %), Russia (4.3 %) and other countries (Bokayev, 2013).

An analysis of the educational backgrounds of the above returnees indicate that about 8.4 % of returnees have higher education, 19.3 % - secondary special education, 55.8% - secondary education, and 16.5% did not possess any education qualification (MLSPP, 2015). Thus, the vast majority of repatriates (91.6 %) did not have an opportunity to access higher educational institutions. However, in 2007 under the Kazakhstani law 2 % of the whole number of scholarships were dedicated for returnee students and was called 'Oralman quota'. This policy enabled ethnic Kazakh returnee students to enroll in any higher educational institution of Kazakhstan. After their return to Kazakhstan, the government endeavors to accept repatriated students at educational institutions by providing special educational support.

However, the majority of Kazakhstani studies found that many returnees encountered failures in developing a strong sense of belonging to their country of destination (Werner et al., 2017), challenges in terms of housing and unemployment (Bonnenfant, 2017), and unmet expectations of dreamed home country (Diener, 2005). All

of the above issues are directly or indirectly connected to the linguistic constraints experienced by returnees in their new homeland (Bokayev, 2013; Bokayev, et al. 2014; Kalysh & Egamberdiyev, 2014; Terlikbayeva, 2017; Toktau, 2017). Therefore, some researchers argue that one of the main reasons for such problems is undeveloped educational policy of migrant learners in Kazakhstan (Terlikbayeva, 2017) or the language policy of government constraining returnees' integration (Bokayev, 2012). These studies showed that repatriates experience considerable difficulties in social and educational spheres due to language barriers, particularly in the Russian language. Kazakhs from China, Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkey are reported to be struggling because of their language skills and unfamiliarity with the Cyrillic script (Kalshabayeva & Seisenbayeva, 2013). However, the gap in the Kazakhstani research area is that authors explored mostly integration and linguistic challenges of returnee students in bilingual environment: Kazakh and Russian, disregarding how the participation of these returnee students changed over time in relation to their linguistic barriers in three languages including English and in different spheres – social and academic. Furthermore, the above studies have mainly approached the issue from the perspective of integration of the returnees in the new bilingual contexts, largely viewing this as a linear process.

In contrast to the above theoretical standpoint, the concept of community of practice (CoP) and its legitimate participation has become significantly influential in finding out how members interact, learn and create new knowledge within a CoP (Gray & Gabriel, 2018). Thus, instead of simply assuming that learners act according to their personal or cultural characteristics or abilities, the CoP perspective highlights a need to consider the roles and status of each participant and how these roles are shaped by the classroom community (Morita, 2004). Negotiation of these roles and identities is not a smooth process because of power relations existing in a CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that



makes newcomers' transition to the 'core' of a new CoP less linear and predictable. Therefore, it is meaningful to explore identities ascribed by the 'old' members of a new CoP towards newcomers. In many contexts, newcomers as international, immigrant or returnee students mostly encounter language challenges that deprive them from full participation in academic and social life. Moreover, there is a dearth of literature on the challenges of participants' interaction from different backgrounds and identities (Hong, 2009). Thus, with the increased migration trend worldwide, it is interesting to chart the returnee students' journey of participation as a 'novice' member in a new environment of Kazakhstan both in academic and social spheres.

According to recent official documents, returnees are entitled to enroll in higher educational institutions (HEIs) on equal basis with other local students. In light of these legal regulations and existing research findings, the question regarding how returnee students negotiate their participation in a new CoP becomes pertinent. Therefore, the current study aimed to explore Chinese Kazakhs returnee students' journey of participation in general since their return to the ancestors' homeland, Kazakhstan. Since the study seeks to chart returnee students' journey of participation, the focus of their participation is not on one particular site or CoP but their membership is traced across a range of sites or communities of practice including school, university and society in general. Furthermore, the study is simultaneously interested in returnee students negotiation of participation in the communities of practice cited above in both the academic and social domains. Participation, in its own way, means gaining some kind of knowledge whether it is about social or academic setting (Gray & Gabriel, 2018). First of all, transition of returnee students from peripheral to full participation enables them to achieve better educational goals. Furthermore, it contributes to becoming a competent member in a new CoP as well as providing a sense of belonging to a new place (Wenger, 2000). Participation in a social

domain may shape how successful a novice can establish himself or herself as a new member of a CoP. Consequently, understanding of the nature of negotiations that are involved in participation is beneficial for students themselves and other members of a community because they can be supported in the process of sharing and creating knowledge. Additionally, this understanding is valuable for university and teaching staff in promoting and managing better participation of returnee students.

### **Statement of problem**

The majority of studies on returnees have revealed that the most challenging aspect in their transition is language issues, namely in Kazakh and Russian (Bokayev, 2013; Bokayev, et al. 2014; Kalysh & Egamberdiyev, 2014; Terlikbayeva, 2017; Toktau, 2017). These issues in turn have significant impact on their sense of belonging, expectations, employment, and economic status (Bonnenfant, 2017; Diener, 2005; Werner et al., 2017). Thus, it is necessary to consider how these language barriers of returnee students influence their membership and participation in a new CoP. Additionally; studies mostly concentrate on exploring returnee students' national or ethnic identities influenced by their linguistic background (Abdukarimova, 2017; Toktau, 2017) rather than self-identifications of newcomers. However, according to the applied conceptual framework of this study any interaction within a community involves power dynamics resulting in tensions within a group. These tensions are caused by the relationships with old members who stay in a more advantageous position to promote or impede novices' participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Therefore, this study also attempts to find out returnee students' self-identification and ascribed identities in relation to their participation. Identification plays a large part in how returnee students as newcomers, go from a position of perceiving themselves as members of the CoP in the Chinese context to seeing themselves as new members of a CoP in Kazakhstan. By closely examining returnee students' experiences

within university setting this study attempts to see how university setting can be an important place where newcomers negotiate their roles and voices in a new CoP.

### **Personal insights and experiences**

From my work experience at one higher educational institute, I found that most returnee students struggle, to some extent, academically and socially. I began to wonder how these returnee students being new members of the Kazakhstani society manage their transition to the new environment. It was not clear for me at first how these students, who have different linguistic and cultural background, integrate in a new place in terms of academic life. However, after reading for more materials on their integration I found that there are some challenges which newcomers encounter in the academic and social settings. That is why I decided to examine closely how these difficulties in their social and academic performance influence the level of their participation. Moreover, I was interested in their relationships with other members (old timers) of a new CoP as teachers, peers, local students and their influence on novices. Therefore, self-identification is also an additional aspect which my study is going to shed light on.

### **The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

By drawing on the theory of social learning or Community of Practice perspective, this qualitative study aimed to explore how returnee students from China negotiate their participation and membership in a new CoP in the Kazakhstani context.

The above purpose addressed through a set of interrelated questions:

1. How does the linguistic background of returnee students influence their level of participation in a new CoP of Kazakhstan?
2. How do returnee students identify themselves as members of a new CoP and what membership identities are ascribed to them by old members?

3. What factors may promote returnee students transition from periphery to the core of participation in a new CoP?

### **Definition of Central Phenomenon**

According to OHCHR (2001), returnee refers to the wide notion which means a refugee who has returned to the historical homebirth. In the Kazakhstani context returnees or repatriates are “foreigners or individuals without citizenship or Kazakh nationality who, resided abroad and who came to Kazakhstan seeking a permanent residence after the independence” (Law on the migration of Republic of Kazakhstan, 1997). In Kazakhstan the term “*oralman*” is adopted by the government which is directly translated from the Kazakh language as “*one who returned*”. However, it is emphasized that not all returnees can be labeled “*oralman*” as it refers to Kazakhs who came from abroad within the quota system (Diener, 2005). Additionally, the word “*oralman*” is identified as having a more negative and marginalizing connotation referring to label of “otherness” (Khizat, 2015). Moreover, this term is going to be excluded from the Kazakh language by the government (Kazakhstan considers excluding term ‘oralman’ from Kazakh language, 2018). Bearing in mind this aspect, I intend to use the words “returnees” or “repatriates” in this research regarding ethnic Kazakhs who return to Kazakhstan for permanent living. In this case, this research focuses on returnee students who have benefitted from the governments’ migration programs.

### **The Significance of the Study**

Better understanding of the nature of returnee students’ participation can be beneficial for university administration and teachers who are responsible for facilitating and promoting the engagement of newcomers in academic and social life. Teachers might be informed about the ways to involve returnee students in the academic issues more

effectively paying attention on the peculiarities of their background. University administration might find new perspectives on the factors influencing returnee students' membership and develop approaches to support them. Moreover, returnee students by reflecting on their experience can acquire new insights of their membership in a new CoP. Learning is placed within CoP and participation is the way to acquire, share and create new knowledge. Therefore, for students themselves, the study might be helpful to gain a better understanding of the nature of their participation and collaboration with local members of a new CoP.

In addition to the above practical significance, my study also responds to the substantive and theoretical gaps in the literature as cited earlier in this chapter. Specifically, this study focuses on participation in three languages: Kazakh, Russian and English compared to the previous Kazakhstani studies that consider integration of returnee students in two languages, namely Kazakh and Russian. Moreover, this study explores participation of returnee students from the perspective of Community of Practice theoretical framework that has not been used earlier in the context of Kazakhstan. Additionally, this framework is helpful in revealing all details of the multilayered nature of returnees' participation in a new environment of Kazakhstan. According to reviewed literature, most of the studies explore participation of first-year students, international students, and minority and immigrant students in a new environment, however, studies on returnee students' participation is relatively scarce. Thus, this study fills an important gap in the existing literature.

### **The Structure of the Study**

The thesis comprises six chapters, starting from the 'introduction' chapter that gives necessary background information of the study, states the research questions and

problem, and proposes the importance of the research. The next chapter reviews and synthesizes the empirical and theoretical studies relevant to this research that offers the theoretical framework that guides the study. Chapter 3 is devoted to discussion of the methodology used in this study, particularly, the rationale for the research design, description of the research population and, data collection and analysis process. This is followed by chapter 4 which offers the analysis of data and presents and interprets the findings in relation to three research questions of the study. Chapter 5 discusses, explains, and comments on the results of the research based on the applied conceptual framework and relevant studies. The final chapter provides a discussion of the findings, recommendations for the main stakeholders and implications for further study.

## Chapter 2. Literature review

This study explores the ways Chinese-Kazakh returnee students negotiate their participation and membership in their new community of practice in Kazakhstan. Specifically the focus is on how acting as 'newcomers', the Chinese Kazakh returnee students participate in their new academic environment in Kazakhstan. The way returnee students with different academic and cultural backgrounds, experiences, and practices establish their participation and membership is studied through the framework of a community of practice (CoP) that involves the concept of learning through social interaction within a community. This framework is appropriate for my study for two reasons. First, the CoP theory is focused mainly on the relationships existing between a community and an individual rather than considering each aspect separately. Another reason for applying this framework is that this concept treats any 'difference or conflicts' as a norm accepting diversity and putting marginal members to the 'forefront of analysis' (Bucholtz, 1999, p. 210). In this way, learning through CoP is similar to "apprenticeship" because of the same nature of relationships between more and less experienced members of community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). 'An apprentice' or a newcomer (less experienced member of CoP) learns something new through social interactions with 'an expert' (more knowledgeable and experienced member), however both benefit due to holding different perspectives and insights (Kerno, 2008).

The theoretical basis of CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991) is grounded in the social theory of learning interpreted as a more natural method (Wenger, 1989) in comparison with traditional conceptualization of learning. Within the traditional conceptualization, learning is described as the direct transition and application of concrete knowledge and skills to a learner. This contrasts to the natural learning method where learning occurs in the social context, through cooperation and co participation of the members of CoP.

However, CoP is not aimed to replace traditional view of learning but it is a way to better understand learning within social interactions (Wenger, 1999).

The concept of CoP is applied to communities only if three distinct features or elements exist, namely a domain, a community and practice (Wenger, 2009). Firstly, every CoP is characterized by sharing common concerns, interests or pursuits which make them easily distinguished from other groups. Shared domain particular to several persons is the reason why CoP is usually formed. Secondly, the core element of the CoP is interaction which implies exchange of information, knowledge and experience, helping and asking for help, and being involved in pair, group or collective discussions within one community. This interaction itself contributes to building a distinct community and shapes the field of interest of this CoP. Finally, members of a community develop collective repertoire or practice that might reflect their beliefs, values or intrapersonal relations. Thus, a particular group of students studying the same major together is considered as a CoP as they are joined by studying the same field of science, by communicating on everyday basis and by having stories, habits, routines or even linguistic behavior particular to this very group.

Ongoing process of learning gives us an opportunity to be involved in a variety of communities of practice or move from one into another whether it is at home, school, university or, in hobbies etc (Gray, 2004; Wenger, 2009). All this participation and circulation helps us to gain and exchange new experience, knowledge and skills. In some communities of practice, we may act as “core members” in other we might be “peripheral ones”. For instance, a student might act as a ‘peripheral’ member in real-life CoP at the same time being a core member in a virtual CoP of the social networks. This variation lies in one’s ability to acquire this shared practice and repertoire, to commit to the joint goal as well as to establish a good rapport with communities’ members (Holmes & Meyerhoff,



1999). In other words, the performance of a new member of the CoP largely depends on how this person can successfully participate in a new place.

Wenger (2000) argues that when you are a novice who has joined a new and unfamiliar community you experience a strong desire to be fitted in and accepted and, to be aligned with the shared experience and gain the same knowledge as your peers have. Wenger (2000) emphasizes the importance of sharing three characteristics domain, community and practice, previously mentioned, which define a person as a “member” who belongs to one particular CoP. In other words, at the initial stages a newcomer acts mostly as a “peripheral member” and then after gaining and sharing certain knowledge, skills, and experience that other have he or she becomes a “core member”. In contrast, several researchers argue that newcomers may prefer to stay “peripheral members” rather than assimilating fully in a new environment (Handley et.al, 2006; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999). It might happen when a new community’s norms, practice or standards do not coincide with novice’s own beliefs and he or she rejects them choosing a peripheral membership. Moreover, other researchers (Handley et. al, 2006; Lave, 1991; Wenger, 1998) proposed that there are a variety of participation levels beyond ‘peripheral and full’ as ‘marginal’, ‘contingent’, ‘non-participation’.

It is argued by several researchers (e.g. Ashfoth & Humphrey, 1993; Handley et al., 2006) that the level or type of participation in a CoP is also of a high significance for newcomers’ practice and integration. If ‘novice’ members experience a conflict of identity in relation to community’s norms or practice they might prefer maintaining a ‘marginal’ membership in this CoP (Wenger, 1998). On the other hand, new participants can adapt their practice according to the needs of CoP, however, only symbolically or superficially. They may act according to recognized norms in a new CoP temporarily but their beliefs and perspectives stay unchanged that represents contingent participation (Handley, 2006).

If a participant chooses not to participate in order to avoid a conflict of identity it is one more variation of participation called non-participation (Handley et al., 2006). However, it is not necessary to participate in one community fully in order to adjust in it. For instance, it has been demonstrated that international students in the United Kingdom were successful in their academic and social life due to building a strong bond to the CoP of other international students (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). It means that the membership in the parallel CoP of international students facilitated their adjustment. Consequently, it cannot be assumed that there is a strong need for forming bonds with local students. On the contrary, in this situation local students are seen in more disadvantageous position as they are deprived of developing global perspectives because of a lack of communication with these international students. Nevertheless, there might be also some obstacles or “boundaries” (Wenger, 2000) influencing the level of participation and preventing these new members from successful integration.

Every CoP is unique by its nature and its practice generating boundaries across other communities. For instance, students of humanity sciences might not understand the inside jokes of the students of medical specialties because of the shared domain and repertoires. Similarly, foreign or returnee students who came with different linguistic and cultural background might experience a variety of difficulties due to the discrepancy of boundaries between the original and host country. In this way, successful participation largely depends on how big this discrepancy between different communities is.

Boundaries might be of three main types: “brokers” referring to people, “artifacts” and different interactions between communities (Wenger, 2000). People participate in a variety of communities so they transfer the acquired practice from one community to another by acting as “brokers”. Artifacts relate to any product or result of community's practice as tools, common language, gestures, documents, assumptions or

other objects. “Novice” members participate in a community by acquiring these various artifacts and trying to adapt and develop their own practice according to common community’s experience (Handley et al., 2006). As an example, we may consider the experience of an expatriate or a student who moves to a new country and engages in a number of new communities of practice at school, university, or a work place. Obviously, this person has to learn languages spoken in the host country, get acquainted with social and cultural norms and rules existed in these communities and create new social circles with the residents of the host country. All these changes influence newcomer’s worldview, perspectives, and behavior. In other words, it includes identity reconstruction (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Breakwell & Canter, 1993; Edwards, 2005; Handley et al., 2006) which means that a person develops certain skills, knowledge and practice which influence his or her identity by building new ones. Therefore, boundaries do not necessarily have negative connotations but, on the contrary, they might play a role of ‘assets’ for new learning (Wenger, 2000).

The role of identity negotiation in a CoP of college and research institutions was investigated by Kasworm (2010). The author argues that we are talking about positional identity in case we negotiate our identities to meet academic goals and develop the sense of agency by achieving these goals. The construction of relational identity is the way students perceive themselves in relation to others’ attitudes or acceptance within social environment. Thus, the co-construction of these two types of identities enables us to see how our own and other’s beliefs about us reflect the level of participation in a certain CoP. Thus, identification is a dynamic process in which individuals define their place in the world by classification of themselves as individuals and as members of different CoP (Deaux, 1993; Goldie, 2012). On the other hand, participation in a CoP also has a large impact on self-identification as new members develop and reconstruct their identities

becoming more-experienced members (Coffman et al., 2016). Reconstruction of one's identity is an ongoing and multilayered process due to its shift from being peripheral to core member that entails also shifts in other aspects of an individual's identity (Vickers & Deckert, 2013).

On the other side, there is a wide range of factors that might also play a significant part in newcomers' functioning and participation in a CoP. According to analysis of the main factors impacting the ability to transfer knowledge in a CoP, the success largely depends on individual and intrapersonal factors (Li et al., 2008). These factors include liking or interests, affiliation (sense of belonging to a community), reputation of a member within a CoP, altruism (readiness to help somebody in a CoP without being rewarded), and personal needs. Additionally, Campbell et al. (2009) suggests that previous experience in social and cultural settings of a new participant in a CoP determines how well this individual will adjust. The authors claim that it is necessary to consider newcomer's prior knowledge and experience, and personal background shaping their participation in practices of a CoP. In this way, the results of Campbell et al. (2009) study highlights the importance of the role of a moderator or manager in dealing with informal learning experience of such new members.

Wenger (1998) argues that internal leadership is central to the development and functioning of CoP. Obviously, recognized experts should be involved in any CoP due to their power of effecting and directing the activity of a CoP. Regards classrooms as a CoP, a teacher plays a mediating role of a recognized expert among members influencing the process of learning, engaging and sharing. Studies of students and teachers' relationships show that when teachers create caring and helpful atmosphere with fair expectations for students to learn, their academic performance and engagement also increase (Kleem & Connell, 2004). In general, university staff's support also matters because when

international students lack assistance from the university administration they tend to rely on mostly other international students (Blankers et al., 2018; Clement et al., 2003).

Additionally, local students might also positively influence newcomer's adjustment showing their willingness to cooperate and adapt their own practice (Amos & Rehorst, 2018; Yan & Pei, 2018). Thus, intrapersonal relations within a CoP of old and new members, teacher and students, administration of the university and students might affect newcomers' adjustment both positively and negatively.

The concept of a CoP is applied in a variety of contexts starting from associations, organizations or government and finishing in education or social sector. To improve our understanding of CoP there is a need to further examine and explore the application of this concept in educational sector, namely to see how this notion is applied in studies related to student participation in a new CoP. There are a number of studies focusing on international students studying abroad in higher educational institutions (El Khoury & Usman, 2018; Kalocsai, 2009; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Palmer, 2015), experience of students of forming a CoP in a classroom (Janson & Howard, 2004; Linehan & McCarthy, 2001), practice of international students' community in terms of language acquisition (Iddings, 2005; Umino & Benson, 2016), as well as forming a CoP of teaching staff to facilitate and promote newcomers' adaptation (Aldana & Martinez, 2018). This review of the literature shows that all authors claim that international students tend to form and engage in their own community of practice as they differ from the locals in terms of culture, background, language proficiency because of which they encounter similar challenges both in academic and social life. According to these studies, usually foreign students have stronger social and academic bonds with representatives of their own community of international students as they can share their experience and find ways to cope with common obstacles. On the

other hand, local students represent members of other community with their own beliefs, experience or background.

Thus, applying the conceptual framework of CoP is helpful to see how returnee students (newcomers) with different backgrounds and experiences transform their practice from acting on the periphery to full participation. The level of participation is shaped by shared domain, practice and experience with the host CoP, additionally by intrapersonal relationships existing within a CoP, by individual factors and by a person's self-identification. The detailed review of the previous international and Kazakhstani empirical studies will be presented in the following section.

### **A Review of the Literature on Students' Participation in a New CoP in HEIs**

International empirical studies on students' participation in social and academic settings of a new CoP are focused mostly on the experience of first-year students (Awang et al., 2014; Byl et al., 2016; Friedlander et al., 2007; Hickman et al., 2000; Lau et al., 2018), international students (Abu Rabia, 2017; Andrade, 2006; Bastien et al., 2018; Beaven & Spenser-Oatey, 2016; Dewey et al., 2012; Gomez et al., 2014), minority students (Makarova & Birman, 2015; Phinney & Haas, 2003), immigrant students (Magoet & Gardner, n.d.); however, studies on returnees' participation in higher education are relatively scarce (Pavlou & Christodoulou, 2005). The reviewed literature findings highlight that despite difference regarding context and background, newcomer students face mostly similar issues in terms of social and academic participation. As my study looks at China-Kazakh returnee students' experience of participation in a new CoP, it is worth considering five main topics emerging from the review of the empirical studies on social and academic adjustment of students in a new CoP of higher education: language barriers, low self-esteem, isolation from family and friends, financial issues, and cultural difference in terms of teaching and learning.

#### **Language barrier and newcomers' participation in a CoP**

Research indicates that returnee newcomers encounter mostly challenges related to language constraints (Amangul, 2013; Diener, 2005; Kalysh & Egamberdiyev, 2014; Terlikbaeyva, 2017; Toktau, 2017). However, there is no information on how the language constraints influence returnee students' level of participation and membership in a new CoP in Kazakhstan. One of the most detrimental issues that affect academic and social adjustment of students is language proficiency. The number of studies on how various countries deal with repatriated citizens is limited and unavailable as they might be usually

written in the language of the original country but not in English (Pavlou & Christodoulou, 2005). Returnee students share the same features as international, minority or immigrant students because all these categories of learners usually have different linguistic, cultural, geographical and even historical background, from locals, that affect their need in adjustment. In other words, their background difference become a barrier in shifting from a “peripheral” to a “core” member of their new CoP. Language proficiency and its influence on the participation of these categories of students will be discussed further.

Language barriers of foreign students in their academic setting usually lead to the problems of adjusting to different accents of their professors, test constructions which result in their poor understanding of class lectures, militating against their active participation or being core members in a CoP (Hanwei et al., 2017). Consequently, these students have to spend more time and effort on the completion of writing as well as reading assignments. Other issues relate to professors' use of complicated and academic vocabulary and their fast speed and pace of speech that make understanding and note taking almost impossible or difficult for international or returnee students (Dewey, 2012). In this way, language-related issues give rise to further challenges in the academic career of students (Wang, 2018). Additionally, many students reported that they feel anxiety and low confidence during verbal interactions in front of class or during discussions with other group mates within one CoP because of low language proficiency (Wang, 2018). Moreover, low language proficiency may trigger poor socialization of a newcomer with other ‘more-experienced’ members.

Along with academic domains, linguistic challenges have an enormous impact on the social experience of students. Thus, Beaven & Oatey (2016) stated that language barriers affect self-esteem negatively and prevent international students from successful participation in social networking with local students. According to some studies, engaging



in different community interactions like sport activities or clubs of common interests may promote better language gains compared to interactions during traditional learning classrooms (Dewey, et al. 2012; Gomez, et al. 2014). However, many international students who face language difficulties often feel “left out” or treated as less competent speakers (Andrade, 2006; Jacob & Greggo, 2001) by local students that deprive them from the possibility to practice their language with locals. As a result, these students become ‘marginal’ members in a new CoP because of low proficiency in a shared language. Obviously, inability to comprehend language may significantly influence students’ psychological adjustment as well.

In case of returnee students, Pavlou & Christodoulou (2002) presented the experience of repatriated students with English language background in Cyprus who were excluded both at the secondary and tertiary level of education due to low language proficiency in Greek. Further research of Pavlou & Christodoulou (2005) suggests that although Cyprus offered approximately 500 reception classes, 700 supplementary tutorial classes and remedial courses in Greek for returnee students, these efforts failed due to the fact that teachers were not trained to teach Greek as a second language and there was a shortage of necessary learning materials. The role of a manager or moderator in newcomers’ participation is again highlighted as university staff’s support may contribute significantly to the further acquisition of a shared practice of a new CoP. Japanese returnees, until recently, were treated and perceived as a problem because of their low proficiency in Japanese and insufficient knowledge of cultural norms and values (Yashiro, 1995). However, nowadays due to increased popularity of multilingualism Japanese returnee students are regarded largely as a valuable human resource able to introduce and share their multilingual and multicultural experience with locals.

In the Kazakhstani context there are studies exploring the integration of minority and returnee students at tertiary level. Minority students prefer to study at schools with their mother tongue as a medium instruction if they are available. Abdurakhimova (2017) explored the integration of Uzbek minorities into Kazakhstani educational institutions and found that these minority students who graduated from Uzbek medium of instruction schools with Kazakh as their L2 and Russian as their L3 have to choose either Russian or Kazakh medium programs. The study revealed that Uzbek students enrolled into Kazakh medium programs were better adjusted socially but in terms of academic life, they felt challenged to understand academic and complex vocabulary and discuss and reflect on questions. In other words, they simultaneously acted as 'core members' at a social level but 'peripheral members' in the academic CoP. Learners enrolled into Russian medium programs encountered difficulties in both social and academic life because of a feeling of failure, embarrassment, alienation and anxiety linked to their accent, inability to express their opinion, present and retell materials. More importantly, students' poor Russian proficiency also impeded their motivation towards building successful relationships with group mates and teachers. Clearly, the discrepancy between shared language tool between CoP in Kazakh and Uzbek medium of instruction was not so profound as between Uzbek and Russian CoP.

Chinese-Kazakh returnee students' experience in terms of language and identity construction was examined by Toktau (2017) by using a combined narrative and phenomenological approach. The study revealed that all participants' language skills of Kazakh varied from almost superficial knowledge of Kazakh to inability to comprehend materials and write appropriately. Almost all Chinese-Kazakh returnees come with writing Kazakh language in Arabic script while in Kazakhstan they have to learn how to write it in Cyrillic. However, the author did not reflect much on the level of participation of returnee

students in these settings. Furthermore, there is no information on the ways returnees' experience is shaped by their English language proficiency. Some studies indicate a limited provision of English to minority groups, especially in the western regions of China (Guo & Gu, 2016; Sharapat, 2018). Similarly, Terlikbaeyva (2017) in her study emphasized returnee students' experience at the secondary education level. Interestingly, in accordance with her findings, returnee students who came with high academic achievement were respected and welcomed by both classmates and teachers but in most cases at the beginning returnee students reported negative or indifferent attitude from teachers. Newcomers' previous knowledge and experience might be valuable asset for sharing knowledge in a new CoP if it is used appropriately. However, in case of one student who was good at subject, language difficulties isolated her from successful socialization with peers and teachers. Consequently, her family decided to move to suburb area.

Overall, the above-mentioned studies demonstrate that students with low language proficiency in host languages have difficulties in the understanding of materials, lectures, instructions, and writing and reading tasks. Some participants reported feelings of anxiety, embarrassment and low self-esteem which also influenced their participation in the social CoP.

### **Identification as a member of a new CoP**

Negotiating participation and membership in a new Cop is closely connected to important issues such as identity, empowerment, agency and access. In the framework of this study, I am not referring to national or ethnic identity but about self-identity or ascribed identity as a member of CoP (Morita, 2004). National identity is mostly about matters of a persons' belonging in terms of citizenship and nation. However, self-identity is individuals' perceptions about themselves and their place in the CoP and the world in

general. There are many studies that explore national identity issues in relation to language learning or acquisition of international students (e.g. Maeder-Quan, 2018; Kamara, 2017; Lin, 2018; Young & Clark, 2017), immigrants (Karam, 2018; Poalelungi, 2016; Takei & Burdelski, 2017), returnees (Akiyama, 2017; Christiansen et al., 2018; Sterling & Pang, 2013). A study conducted to reveal ethnic identities of returnee students in the Kazakhstani context (Toktau, 2017) shows that Chinese-Kazakh returnees migrate to their ancestors' homeland to maintain their Kazakh identity. In order to explore returnee students' participation and membership there is a need to examine participants' perspectives on their self-identification.

Wenger and Lave's theory (1991) on legitimate peripheral participation consider transmission of newcomers to the position of old-timers as a matter of negotiation of conflicts and transformations rather than smooth assimilation. Power relations are what might facilitate and at the same time restrict novice members' legitimate participation in a new CoP despite the fact that they are given all necessary resources (Morita, 2004). Cummins (1996) argues that affirmation of identity includes the establishment of trust and respect between a teacher and student as a result of the promotion of collaborative relationships. In other words, teaching staff both empower and disempower new students in interpersonal and intergroup relations. Identities imposed by teachers and other members are called ascribed identities (Morita, 2004) which in some cases can restrict students' participation that leads to establishing marginal position by them. Otherwise, when teachers try to assist novice members they might make a significant progress towards their legitimacy of participation in a new CoP. Moreover, members may encounter conflict across a variety of institutional communities (Chen, 2010), one community might accept this newcomer as a 'bright' and 'smart' person, however, this individual might be perceived by members of another CoP as 'misbehaving'.

On the contrary, according to Gee's interpretation of identity negotiation, newcomers can assign an identity for themselves for being recognized in a certain way which is called achieved identity (Palmer, 2007). However, it depends on 'old' members who directly make decisions in accepting or rejecting such kind of proposed identity. Similarly, successful participation is measured by the way veteran members create their positive or negative images of newcomers, the prejudice, concerns or fears they have towards a new flow of members in their own CoP. For instance, Dajnoki et al. (2017) found that public acceptance and positive images of novices usually correspond to the level of old members' awareness on immigration issues or their belief that immigrants do not have the possibility to compete with locals whether it is about their job positions or social status. In the latter issue we are not talking about positive image but rather 'neutral' attitude that locals have, based on their perceptions of inequality existing in the social level. From the perspective of international students who are also novices, there is a need in frequent support regarding emotional, social, practical and informational issues from more experienced members or locals (Chuah & Singh, 2016). Kim et al. (2017) reported about negative attitudes of local students towards international students rooted in a lack of intercultural sensitivity. Again the authors highlight the importance of a teacher in facilitation and clarification between old and new members' worlds, their backgrounds, experience, and knowledge.

Faculty members usually are challenged to address culturally diverse students' needs in the classroom and to promote the creation of collaborative relationships between old members and new (Lin, 2008). Positive 'teacher-student' relationship contribute also to building trustful and free communication between staff and new members, increase of students' motivation and participation (Bird, 2017; Frisby & Martin, 2010; Wilson et al., 2010). Additionally, information provision by the university administration and ongoing

newcomers' contact with university is also highlighted in several studies as a major aspect in the further participation of new members (Calder et al., 2016; Cameron, 2006; Chen, 2007).

In general, identification is a complicated and ongoing process including not only self-image but also images that other people create in relation to you. In the case of returnee students' identification, the major roles are played by teaching staff, local students and society of the host country as well as friends and family members of returnees. Those stakeholders are the main actors who have the power of facilitating or impeding the integration of new members. The creation of positive images and acceptance of those actors depends on the level of their multicultural and multilingual awareness and beliefs, and intercultural sensitivity. Additionally, a newcomer can be the main leverage for the formation of positive images towards him or herself by proposing desired identity. However, every person maintains different identities in a variety of communities of practice by developing their sense of belonging or affirmation to a community and gaining some kind of support through these interactions.

### **Establishing relationships within a parallel CoP**

The change of geographical location from a home to host country entails changes of newcomers' attitudes, behavior and practice in accordance with norms and values existing in a new community. To sustain a sense of belonging to the home country newcomers or international students usually form social networking with their families or friends, however, according to some studies these international students also use networks to establish a good rapport with other international students (Binsahl et al., 2015; Lim & Pham, 2016). Such interaction in a parallel CoP might both put these newcomers in advantageous as well as disadvantageous positions (Lim & Pham, 2016). Newcomers

benefit as they receive support and develop their communication skills and understanding of the host country in interactions with other international students. On the other hand, it impedes building relationships with old members of a new CoP making collaboration and sharing of multiple perspectives, experience and knowledge difficult to achieve.

According to Metro-Roland (2018), by creating a community that determines ones' nationality and citizenship, a newcomer increases his or her sense of belonging to a particular identity. Thus, engagement in international students' community enables a newcomer to be identified as having an 'international identity' with all peculiarities and differences from locals. In the same vein, newcomers' relation to 'returnees' community' can make them easily recognized, to some extent, in terms of their background, experience and knowledge. Forming a parallel CoP might be official or unofficial, intentional or unintentional. As an example, we may consider the experience of creation on an official basis of the 'Club of international friendship' aimed to support international students' adaptation in social, academic and cultural affairs (Fayzullina, 2019). From the perspectives of members of another CoP self-sustained by international students the list of benefits of forming international students' CoP encapsulates writing support and advice, understanding of the relations with supervisors and their expectations in academic affairs, building trust among members, gain intercultural competencies, share opportunities on job finding, volunteering and service learning (El Khoury & Usman, 2018). Contrasting to another research conducted on international students' sense of belonging it has been found that forming CoP of international students detach them in some ways from the local community and their host country (Poteet and Gomez, 2015). In general, most researchers claim about greater involvement of novices and veteran members can be achieved through a variety of extracurricular activities, practice and techniques within a multicultural and multilingual framework for introducing diverse background and cultural information to the

participants. Balancing between interactions and cooperation with members of new CoP and old CoP result in better integration and participation in a new CoP.

To summarize, the existing literature indicates that transition of newcomers from one CoP to another is complicated by the discrepancy of the shared repertoire, practice and experience between new and old members of a community. Besides, power relations between old and new members trigger additional tensions within a CoP. Thus, the overview of relevant literature on the applied conceptual framework shows the complex character of novices' participation in a new CoP. Moreover, review of previous empirical studies shows that although returnee students' integration have been explored in terms of two languages, these studies overlooked non-linear process of returnees' participation in different settings.



### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The previous chapter describes and explores the conceptual framework of the study and other relevant studies. In so doing, it also enlightened the researcher's understanding of adapting the approaches most fitting the unique nature of the study and the conceptual framework. The current chapter draws attention to the detailed discussion of employed methodology. The first section is aimed to present justification of the use of qualitative interview-based approach in this study. The next section describes the method of sampling and population of the study. The last section is dedicated to discuss data collection and analysis followed by the ethical issues pertinent of this study.

The research examines the ways returnee students negotiate their participation in a new CoP in Kazakhstan at the tertiary level. In the light of the main purpose, the study attempts to answer the following questions: How does linguistic background of returnee students influence their level of participation in a new CoP of Kazakhstan?; How do returnee students identify themselves as members of a new CoP and what membership identities are ascribed to them by old members?; What other factors contribute to the promotion of returnee students transition from the periphery to the core of a new CoP?

#### **Research design**

This study employed a qualitative research design to gain a deep understanding of returnee students' experience in negotiating their participation in a new environment. Participation, in this case, is viewed as a central phenomenon or experience that needs to be explored and described from the perspective of a participant (Creswell, 2014; Leavy, 2017). The current method was purposively used because of socially constructed nature of the study, restricted number of the research participants, and uniqueness of returnee students' experience.

To describe a lived phenomenon shared by several participants a phenomenological, interview-based study was used. Qualitative phenomenological study allows investigating one's subjective experience (Mertens, 2014) or what this experience means to an individual in a particular situation. Considering the value of our inquiry into returnee students' views, this study follows Cohen et al. (2000) interpretation of phenomenological method which 'sees behavior as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective and physically described reality' (p. 23). Thus, I consider participation of students not based on the judgments of their personal or cultural peculiarities, preferences, or abilities but in relation to a variety of internal factors influencing their membership and participation. However, one may argue that quantitative instruments can be applied for exploring data that is not 'naturally' measured by quantitative methods as 'attitudes' or 'beliefs' (Muijs, 2004). The counter argument for this might be that returnee students experience is considered as unique (Toktau, 2017; Sharapat, 2018) because their beliefs, values, practice, preferences, and backgrounds differ significantly therefore quantitative instruments could not capture all these details (Mertens, 2014).

Along with the uniqueness, restricted number of participants within a research site might specify the qualitative nature of the study (Mertens, 2014). That is opposed to the quantitative methodology's principle implying 'to select as large a sample as possible from the population' (Creswell, 2014, p. 146) in order to gain richer results and less potential errors. Since this study is focused on returnee students who are ethnic Kazakh and migrated from China, the overall number of participants is notably limited within a research site. In a similar vein, qualitative approach was employed by most studies exploring returnee or minority students' experience (Abdurakhimova, 2017; Kalysh & Egamberdiyev, 2014; Khizat, 2015; Sharapat, 2018; Toktau, 2017). Abdurakhimova

(2017) analyzed Uzbek minority students' experience at tertiary level using qualitative interview-based approach. Similarly, Toktau (2017) investigated the issues of identity, language and integration of returnee students by applying combined narrative and phenomenological research design. Kalysh, A., & Egamberdiyev, M. (2014) in their study use in-depth interviews along with survey and observation to explore adaptation and ethno-linguistic identity of immigrants.

### **Sample**

The effectiveness and value of interviewing process largely depends on the interviewer's competence to conduct it, the quality of data generated with the participants and the type of sampling strategy selected by the researcher (Bailey, 2019). The process of interview recruitment was developed through the use of snowball sampling. The target population of this study includes university students who are ethnic Kazakhs coming to their homeland from China for permanent or temporary residence.

It has been argued that snowball sampling originally was designed to reach the social networks of population and then the opportunity to convert this sampling strategy into random (Goodman, 1961). This design implies that the researcher contact and interview initial participants through personal connections or networks, then by asking these participants if they know and can recommend other people who meet the same criteria the researcher recruit more respondents. To access first-level participants personal connections were employed since the researcher has had work experience in the following research site. Afterwards, these referrals were asked to refer other potential respondents who share similar practice being direct representatives of a target population. To maintain ethical standards it was decided to reach research participants through personal connections rather than contacting institutional referrals as well as returnee students are

difficult to be identified among other students. Additionally, the recruitment strategy allows gathering more respondents from different layers (Ungvarsky, 2017), thus, in the case of this study the sample of research population varies in terms of the years of the study at the HEI and years of residence in Kazakhstan. The indication of age and years spent abroad brought additional information to study. Moreover, there were some returnee students who had an experience of studying at Kazakhstani secondary schools and attending a preparatory course for entering university.

By establishing trustful and respectful relationships with the initial referrals, a researcher may gain positive recommendations that will influence further process of recruitment (Bailey, 2019). Thus, conducting snowball sampling might be beneficial because other potential respondents recommended by referrals can be interested in the process of the research conduction and participation.

Initially, there were seven participants recruited during data collection process, however, one participant contacted the researcher to withdraw from the study before interviewing. The respondents were given pseudonyms for making their stories and experience easy to recall and refer to. In general, there are 6 participants of whom two are males and four are females. Their residence in Kazakhstan varies from 5 months to 7 years of living or studying in the country of destination. All participants are permanent residents having citizenship of Kazakhstan except Galiya who came to Kazakhstan only for educational purposes. Three participants attended and one is currently attending a preparatory course lasting nine months to enter HEIs in Kazakhstan.

Table 1

Student's name	Major	Sex	Years of residence (Kazakhstan)	Residence	Years of study at HEI	Attended a preparatory course
Togzhan	ecology	female	7 years	Kazakhstan	2th year	Yes
Aset	engineering	male	5 years	Kazakhstan	1st year	No
Zhanar	geosciences	female	5 months	Kazakhstan	1st year	No
Marat	Physical education	male	2 years	Kazakhstan	1st year	Yes
Sholpan	physics	female	1 year	Kazakhstan	-	Attending currently
Galiya	agronomy	female	5 years	China	4th year	Yes

### Criteria of research site's selection

The current research is conducted at one university located in the Eastern part of Kazakhstan. Using purposeful sampling this research site was chosen because it was convenient for me to gain access to the data easily and quickly. Besides, 'engaging in fieldwork and collecting data involve negotiating relationships with participants and gatekeepers' (Creswell, 2014, p.482) as a result previous personal connections might be beneficial for further data collection. Moreover, this university is allocated 100 grants every year among other state universities for admitting returnee students willing to enroll in HEIs of Kazakhstan (Bokayev, 2013). The particular area was chosen as it is reported that since 2005 returnees have been located mostly in four regions: Eastern Region, Kostanay Region, Pavlodar Region, and North-Kazakhstan Region (Vostochnyi Kazakhstan - odin iz regionov, 2016). The interviews were conducted in a classroom provided by the gatekeeper. However, to protect the study participants' anonymity the classroom's keys were collected beforehand as well as every participant was assigned precise time for interview. In this way only myself and the research participant were

present during the interview. Additionally, the name of the university was not identified and mentioned during the whole process of study in order to keep the confidentiality of all respondents.

### **Data analysis approach**

‘Analyzing qualitative data requires understanding how to make sense of text and images’ which develops gradually as you analyze, organize, code and describe your data (Creswell, 2014, p. 236). Therefore, I want to highlight all necessary stages of data analysis process and strategies to show how I arrived at the findings.

After completion of participants' interviewing, I immediately started to transcribe six audiotapes with making notes of all additional data and details of data collection process. Then, to get deeper analysis of all collected data I load and code these transcriptions using computer software program NVivo designed for qualitative data analysis. However, during categorizing raw data I encountered failure in gaining broader picture since it became mechanic systematization of data. Leech & Onwuegbuzie (2011) argue in their study that besides NVivo is one of the commonly used tools for analyzing qualitative data the process of analysis might lack creativity, intuition, insight replaced by mechanical and systematic analysis. Indeed, a researcher plays a crucial part in analyzing thoroughly the reached data considering all details. It is consistent with Denzin & Lincoln's description of a researcher as 'a main tool' for analyzing the data even if it is organized and interpreted through NVivo computer package (2005). Taking into consideration these features, I decided to analyze data of the study manually which is seen to be more traditional.

In most of the cases, novice researchers are those who are challenged in deciding on the type of analysis approach to employ especially when there are several research

questions to answer and varied data sets to interpret (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

Therefore, firstly I decided to identify the approach that appropriately and effectively address theoretical and practical interests and purpose of the current study. The method of analysis chosen by the researcher is referred in different ways as inductive or content approach for structuring and coding raw data. Hsieh & Shannon (2005) divide content approach into three categories emphasizing direct content approach those principles are similar to the analysis undertaken in the current study. The authors state that 'analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes' (Hsieh & Shannon, p.5). Similarly, initially three topics emerged from the literature review of the conceptual framework and previous relevant studies. These themes transmitted into three main codes as linguistic background and participation, self-identity and ascribed identities, and supporting factors.

Thomas (2003) refers to this strategy for analyzing qualitative data as general inductive approach. Thus, the author lists the following principles underlying the use of this approach: 1) transcripts are read multiple times for identifying the main codes and topics; 2) if new codes appear then the coding frame is changed and analyzed repeatedly; 3) then, a researcher develops categories that create later broader themes; 4) transcripts' lines are grouped by using different markers or tools to highlight a variety of themes; 5) the relationships between groups are also identified. This chain of steps in analyzing qualitative raw data by inductive method reflect the same sequence of steps used in the frame of this study.

### **Ethical considerations**

To gain access to the research site and potential participants the researcher obtained permission first of all at organizational level. Before going to the research site, I

submitted my Consent Forms, Ethics Review Form, CITI training certificate involving issues of ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of my research participants, explaining potential risks and benefits of my study, and describing voluntary nature of their participation. Later, The NUGSE Research Committee reviewed my study proposal and granted approval to undertake fieldwork.

Before starting data collection, participants were briefed about the focus of the research; the voluntary character of their participation; their right to decline participation or withdraw at any time during or after the interview; the nature of their participation and the benefits and disadvantages of their participation to them; and assured about their anonymity and confidentiality. I had the Consent forms signed before the interview and the time for data collection with necessary details about the study and contact information of the researcher. Participants were provided with the protocols of interview beforehand. The process of interview was audio-recorded with the permission of the participants in other case note-taking was used. The interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed time and in Kazakh and Russian languages depending on the participant's choice.

Additionally, to ensure the anonymity or confidentiality of my participants during data collection and storage, the following measure were taken:

- The name of higher educational institution was intentionally changed in pseudonym form during the whole process of writing and conducting the research;
- In order to protect the participants' names, identities, and related to them identifying information was removed from the study presentation;
- Documents with the identifiable information of students were kept in secure place;
- Participants were assigned pseudonyms



Furthermore, Computer materials referring to this study were kept in a password-protected file. In general, the potential risk to participants was limited as the questions were intended to find out about their experience of participation in relation to their linguistic background and interpersonal relationships with other members of a community as well as to reveal the additional factors of promotion of their participation. Participating students were all over 18 years old and therefore were eligible to give their consent to participate in a study. In case of any inconvenience from participants' side, they could withdraw from the study at any stage of the data collection without having any negative consequences on them. Along with providing the informed consent form which is "a valid measure for the protection of research participants" (Leavy, 2017, p.56), there was a need to emphasize also situational and relational ethics between researcher and participants (as cited in Leavy, 2017). As participants voluntarily joined the research project, they were reassured of their right to withdraw at any time from the interview process. To warrant the safety of the human subjects and protect their confidentiality, names of the participants were intentionally changed and they were assigned pseudonyms.

### **Limitations of the study**

The main limitation of the study is that the researcher does not belong to the community of returnees, as a result being an ethnic but 'authentic' Kazakh I was seen as an 'outsider' by most of my respondents. Consequently, it affected how open and free the participants of the study were while discussing and sharing their experience regarding personal life and academic issues. From the perspective of a researcher, some respondents were more reserved keeping their real thoughts as they tended to make longer pauses to think some responses through. To minimize potential inequality, I tried to establish trustful relationships with my participants by providing more comfortable atmosphere, showing them respect and reassuring them towards the confidentiality of personal information.

Secondly, there are always some power dynamics between an interviewer and interviewees ( ) which might be further increased by the fact that the researcher has working experience as a teacher at this HEI. Since some students recognize the researcher as a member of a teaching staff it might contribute to the fears of students to provide 'wrong' answers that would influence somehow their personal or academic life. In order to prevent such beliefs, I started my interviews by explaining that the participation is on the voluntary basis and respondents have a right to skip unwanted questions or withdraw at any period of data collection.

### **Conclusions**

To sum up, this chapter was intended to provide a full description of a methodology of the study. The study employed qualitative interview-based method with phenomenological approach. Six research participants who are ethnic Kazakh students returned from China were interviewed during the data collection process. The data analysis was done using inductive general method for analyzing qualitative interview-based research. All ethical issues were considered to ensure students' confidentiality and anonymity. The next chapter will present interpretation of the findings of the current research.

## **Chapter 4. Findings**

The study sought to explore returnee students' experiences of negotiating their membership and participation in a new CoP in a Kazakhstani University. The study utilizes the Community of Practice (CoP) framework to chart the returnee students' journey of participation as a 'novice' member in a new environment both in academic and social spheres. This chapter presents the analysis of data constituting seven individual interviews with Chinese-Kazakh returnees. The literature review highlighted that participation and membership of returnee students in the Kazakhstani context is closely connected to important issues including language proficiency, self-identification, and membership in an old CoP. After an iterative analysis that involved moving back and forth between data analysis and my theoretical framework, three themes emerged. I present my analysis with the first theme which relates to Chinese-Kazakh returnee students' linguistic background and participation. The second theme offers my analysis of the ways Chinese-Kazakh returnees' self-identification and ascribed identities shapes their participation in a new CoP in Kazakhstan. The third and final theme analyses factors supporting the transition of returnee students from peripheral to core membership in their new CoP in Kazakhstan.

### **Chinese-Kazakh Returnee Students' Linguistic Background and Participation**

My analysis indicates that Chinese returnee students' participation in their new CoP was strongly shaped by their linguistic background. I first illustrate how their participation has changed over time, highlighting the initial challenges they encountered as a novice member of their CoP. I next show the ways returnee students' linguistic repertoire is associated with their participation in academic and social spheres in Kazakhstan.

The returnee students participating in this study faced initial challenges in all three languages, i.e. Kazakh, Russian and English – limiting their membership to 'peripheral' and constraining them to participate at the margins of their new CoP both in

academic and social domains. I look at the ways they negotiate their participation in each of the three languages required in their CoP – Kazakh, Russian, and English.

Starting with Kazakh, despite the fact that all participants reported that they use Kazakh on everyday basis and refer to their Kazakh language competence as relatively good they experienced some challenges. Some of them highlighted the superior position of Chinese language in their repertoire. Insufficient knowledge as well as the difference of Kazakh spoken in China and Kazakhstan in terms of accent and dialect resulted in poor understanding and difficulty in speaking constraining returnee students' participation in the initial stages when they entered their CoP in Kazakhstan as articulated by one returnee:

Honestly speaking, firstly when I came to Kazakhstan I did not know Kazakh language as now because it was provided in our school as an additional subject and I was among mostly Chinese people so I knew Chinese better than Kazakh and there was other accent, dialect... I did not understand and could not explain my thoughts but it was a matter of time (Galiya)

In this way, Galiya emphasized that in the initial stage her language competence in Kazakh was not good enough for maintaining core membership. However, after she raised her language proficiency in Kazakh according to the new community's norms she was able to achieve the position of a core member. Similarly, Sholpan also talked about the difference in Kazakh used in their old and new Cop. In addition, they pointed out that translanguaging in the multilingual context of Kazakhstan posed some difficulties in their participation:

At the beginning when someone even spoke Kazakh I did not understand them, they mix their Kazakh with Russian and accents differ. And I also get used to Chinese that is why it was difficult to accustom with this.

In this case, the participant believed that the use of translanguaging by core members of the CoP as well as her exposure to Chinese speaking environment affected her ability to comprehend and use Kazakh language appropriately, limiting her participation in the academic sphere. Additionally, Chinese-Kazakh returnees were taught to use Arabic script in writing Kazakh; however, in the Kazakhstani context the Cyrillic script is still widely used. Thus, the majority of participants refer to the difference in script as the most challenging for their participation as it caused problems for them in reading, writing and speaking Kazakh. Sholpan described her experience as follows:

Also reading texts was challenging for me I spent about 1.5 hours to read one text as well as I was not able even to pronounce some terms of biology for example. From 10<sup>th</sup> grade I went to the Kazakhstani School.

The participant in this extract shows how script variation might have an impact on speaking skills and how she acquired the standards of new CoP in terms of reading, writing and speaking. Interestingly, most returnee students commented on their experience of coping with script difference as time-consuming because they had to learn writing and reading in Cyrillic alphabet from the very beginning as schoolchildren. Consequently, they spent more time on writing and reading assignments in comparison with local students. Indeed, one participant, Zhanar indicated that she is still struggling with writing and reading due to script difference as this is her first year of study in Kazakhstan. Other students had spent in Kazakhstan more than three years in Kazakhstan and therefore, they had learnt how to write and read using Cyrillic script.

Some cultural differences in non linguistic communication were indicated which do not appear have a direct impact on participation but such difference did hamper communication. Cultural differences are related to the variety of ways to use gestures, interjections or behavior. For instance, one participant's experience is:

Yes. Sometimes... for example in Kazakhstan “m ...m.” means ‘No’ but in China it means ‘Yes’. So when I said “m..m.” they thought I meant “No” but it was actually “Yes”. Then they started to clarify by asking do you mean yes or no. Then of course I explained it (Togzhan)

In general, the transition of returnee students from peripheral to core membership initially was complicated by the difference in norms and standards of the Kazakh language used in the new community.

In contrast to Kazakh, Russian language use was more complicated for Chinese-Kazakh returnee students because they have not learnt this language before. They do not share the similar practice of learning Russian with their new CoP because this practice was not established or required in their old CoP. Over half of the participants (four out of seven) described that although they understand Russian speech well enough, they cannot give a response. This is clearly illustrated by the extract from Togzhan's interview:

It happens when I talk to teachers. Despite understanding their words, I cannot give an answer. And then when I need to deal with some documents if there is a Russian speaker I cannot answer this person... usually it is the most challenging to respond but I understand everything what is told

This respondent explains that her low proficiency in Russian language resulted in challenges experienced in academic and everyday life. Additionally, other interviewees reported that returnee students' parents also encounter similar problems in making documents because of their limited competence in Russian.

My analysis further indicates that returnee students' inability to speak Russian also affects their self-confidence and triggers anxiety while speaking. As they did not have an opportunity to practice speaking in Russian before they feel unconfident, confused and worried about making mistakes. Aset pointed out: “when I want to say something in

Russian I stop and think: Oh...no that might be wrong ... (laughing). I am afraid to make mistakes". Moreover, one student claims that irrespective of the time she has been studying Russian she is still not confident to start speaking spontaneously so she compares this language to others which she already knows by saying: "It seems to be a completely different language from others like Chinese and Kazakh".

Another participant Zhanar also indicated the case when she was lost and felt helpless: "once I got lost in this town. When you are on the bus on your way and want to ask where it goes you don't know how to ask it in Russian as people there speak mostly Russian". The challenges encountered in the use of Russian impacted on their participation in the academic CoP as well. For example, Togzhan indicated that she failed an exam due to some misunderstandings in exam taking procedure:

There were lots of challenges, for instance, when I had to take Russian language exam and I failed my exams so before taking this exam I had to write a statement but I did not know about it. And because it was time to take a test I decided to take it but then I failed

Returnee students entering a university usually pass oral exam at the initial stages which is considered easier in the subjects as Russian and English for Professional Purposes instead of testing which is compulsory for all local students. Before passing these oral exams returnees have to write a statement about asking a permission from the administration of a university to change the form of an exam. From this extract it is clear that a participant failed not because of her low competence in Russian language but because of some procedures in taking exams. However, Togzhan further explained that she was informed about the statement 2 days before the exam and the problem was that this document was not signed on time. As a consequence, later she was given an opportunity to pass this exam again but in the oral form. In this case, we see that the change of assessment form is also

initial adaptations that a university administration makes to support returnee students' transition in their academic affairs.

Finally, focusing on English, the participating returnee students differed in their English language competence. According to some studies, the provision of English is limited for minority groups in China, especially in the western regions (Guo & Gu, 2016, Sharapat, 2018). That can be a possible reason why Kazakh-Chinese returnees have a varied level of English proficiency. Thus, while two returnee students claimed that they had not studied English before entering a university, three others claimed a relatively limited proficiency in English and two returnee students stated that their language level in English is good. Togzhan reflects that English language learning was not so challenging as Russian because of teacher's support:

Honestly speaking, we did not learn it so well at school. But there it wasn't so hard in terms of English compared to Russian because my teacher pushed me forward and motivated me a lot. English was easier for me than Russian

Emotional and psychological help received from a teacher facilitated the learning process of the returnee student and supported them in claiming active membership in their CoP. Thus, one of the reasons might be teacher's support in academic domain as well. By contrast, the Chinese language proved a barrier in acquiring membership in the English CoP for some returnee students. For example, Galiya emphasized the impact of Chinese language background in these terms: "First I learnt Chinese then when it comes to English it was hard. After Chinese my tongue was not so flexible for speaking in English. Like my Chinese pronunciation affects my English".

Most of returnee students describe their experience in terms of challenges in finding some places and, being lost which are closely connected with their linguistic competence. Zhanar and Sholpan shared with their experience in this way:



Of course because we came to new environment you usually face some challenges as in everyday life. But we get used to it little by little. If you go somewhere you should know the exact location and you do not understand where it is as well as you do not understand the names of things. Some objects are not familiar for us and the names of objects differ in China and Kazakhstan

Notably, these challenges are again closely connected to the linguistic background of returnee students who feel unconfident in a new place. Importantly, these linguistic challenges restrict returnee students' participation in the academic and social domains of their new communities of practice.

Thus, Chinese-Kazakh returnee students' maintenance of participation and membership is largely shaped by their linguistic competence in three languages – Kazakh, Russian and English. The findings of this study show that in Kazakh the membership of returnee students in the social domain was 'core' but in the academic domain it was 'peripheral'. However, in Russian their membership was 'peripheral' in both academic and social domains. In case of the English language, there is a mixed picture in the academic domain because the language proficiency of returnee students in English differs. Possible reasons for such variations in English of returnee students might be insufficient support from the teachers or insufficient provision of English in their old CoP in China.

In concluding this sub-section, it is worth discussing the extent to which the language repertoires of my research participants were being utilized in their new CoP. Bearing in mind that Chinese-Kazakh returnee students came with different linguistic and cultural experience it was worth considering whether their language repertoire is used in their academic or social lives. All participants were competent in both Kazakh and Chinese languages, one of respondents Togzhan indicated Uigur language competence gained through communication with friends. Two participants, Asset and Galiya also reported that

they learnt the Arab language as their L3 at the secondary school. However, almost all participants claimed that their linguistic background is not so helpful in Kazakhstan despite their relative competence in Kazakh. Only one participant Asset stated: “Sometimes it is helpful. So there I am invited as a translator that is helpful. Бір тілді білсең ол сенің бір ойынды арытады”. Regards the question of the use of linguistic repertoire this participant expressed his opinion through a popular Kazakh proverb which means “Learn a new language and get a new soul”. Knowledge of Chinese language gave him an opportunity to earn additional money to cover some expenses.

The analysis shows that returnee students do not have an opportunity to use their linguistic and cultural repertoire to the full extent in the Kazakhstani context both in academic and social life. Besides, teachers also do not refer to their linguistic background which could have potentially supported them in their journey from peripheral to core membership in their new CoP.

### **Self and ascribed identification in a new CoP in Kazakhstan**

How the participants identified themselves as members and how they are identified by others, i.e. ascribed identities has a great significance for returnee students' negotiation of their membership, particularly in the social domains. Additionally, in this section I reflect on how participants are willing to be identified by others.

#### **Self-identification**

From some respondents' point of view an ability of building a good rapport with someone firstly depends on their personal qualities as one participant mentioned: “Actually, I am an easy-going person so it is easy for me to make friends outside the university and inside that is why it was ok”. Togzhan indentifies herself as a ‘confident’ and ‘sociable’ individual

who can establish friendly relationships with surrounding people. Thus, such perceptions about herself and her place in a new CoP might influence her membership positively.

It is interesting to consider the experience of another participant in adapting different linguistic behaviors depending on the environment. Being a permanent resident of China, Galiya notes that she is temporarily in Kazakhstan and her main aim is to take a university degree. In this way, she notes:

.. It seems that when I speak Kazakh there I adapted some kind of Russian accent and when I returned to China and speak to my relatives they say: Your Kazakh is strange still I was speaking Kazakh but they notice that my Kazakh became more Kazakhstani. It might be because I tend to use different accent and dialect. But when I came to Kazakhstan at the first time my group mates refer to my Kazakh as strange. Now everybody gets used to it when I return to China I use the dialect or Kazakh language which is appropriate for that country when I came to Kazakhstan I avoid using the same words I adapt my language in accordance with my surrounding environment

This shows that overtime some returnee students are able to negotiate their memberships both in their new and old communities of practice. Linguistic variation of Kazakh language spoken and used in China and Kazakhstan determines how she adapts her speech in interactions with people from these two different communities. It means that she is performing a particular identity regarding the use of language in each context in ways that prevent her being placed in a peripheral position. In addition, the participant claims that these adaptations are made to show her belonging to either Kazakhstani or Chinese residents' community.

These two examples of self-identification show that a 'novice' member of a CoP can establish own identity in a way that facilitates their transition to a full participant.

Thus, new members might adapt their practice, norms and standards in line with those existing in a new CoP. Togzhan acquired an identity tending to socialize easily in the first case and Galiya adapted her linguistic behavior according to norms of a new CoP in the second. However, 'veteran' members of a new community, staying on more powerful positions, have a significant role in accepting and assigning images of newcomers.

**Identity ascribed by members of the host community.** Perceptions and attitudes of other people might influence significantly returnee students' identity and their participation in the social domain of a CoP. In general, students reported establishing good rapport with older members of their CoP, especially with their group mates. However, some students indicated that individual issues of labeling affected them negatively. Thus, two participants mentioned some kind of "labeling" which exists amongst locals but they do not connect it to their linguistic competence:

Sometimes yes, for instance, I don't know how explain it... errr... There are people who accept you and want to be friends with you and there are those who do not accept and there those who treat you differently like you are oralman (Marat)

Sometimes people say that we are oralmans and do not accept us and when you socialize with other people you become to think that I am an oralman and put yourself down and you become more defensive while communicating with others (Sholpan)

In case of Marat, he describes a variety of people who act in different ways in relation to him. According to his opinion, it depends mostly on people and their personalities, perceptions and views. Sholpan reported how this labeling affects her psychological and emotional state as she pointed out that "otherness" makes her feel marginalized or

excluded which also impacts on her self-esteem and the way she socializes with other people.

Another example shows how linguistic competence of returnee students can affect their perceptions of other members' attitudes towards them. As a result, linguistic competence of participants also influenced their socializing as Sholpan claims: "sometimes when people speak Russian which I don't know very well it seemed that they can say something about you and usually I am not confident while trying to speak in it". Low proficiency in the Russian language can be a reason for wrong judgments and low confidence of returnee students influencing their self-identification.

Ascribing particular membership positions to returnee students was not just limited to the social domains in the Kazakhstani context but also extended to the academic domain. In their academic career returnee students closely interact and work with teaching staff. Overall, they expressed positive feelings towards relationships with teachers at the university but there were returnees who have attended secondary schools in Kazakhstan. One of these participants indicates that university teachers are more supportive in comparison with those at a school. Togzhan said:

When I studied at school teachers did not help me at all... on the contrary if I was not able to read they started to scold and yell at me. They tried to put us down by emphasizing what we could not do but here situation is different

According to this participant some school teachers showed mostly negative attitudes towards repatriated learners. These teachers assess returnee learners similarly with the local peers without paying attention to features and factors returnee students have as a result of their long permanent residence in other country. Negative attitude of teachers who look more at these students' limitations in knowledge rather than looking for ways to develop their skills might make returnees feel disregarded and ascribed an inferior status in

comparison with locals. Perceived discrimination and exclusion pushes them to remain peripheral members in a new CoP. Furthermore, the same respondent indicated that as returnees have lived and studied in another country they lacked some academic and contextual knowledge which locals have as a result they were less likely to pass the Unified National Testing. That is why teachers perceived them as a threat to the status of the school. Togzhan expressed it by saying:

At that time I did not study the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and started 9<sup>th</sup> grade there in Kazakhstan so teachers said that my level of knowledge does not correspond to the level of 9<sup>th</sup> grade so they said I cannot be enrolled to this grade. And they said if I could read a newspaper I could be enrolled. I could already read in Kazakh and I was enrolled.

At the beginning I wanted to enter this university, however, I was not permitted to pass UNT as they thought I am returnee and could not pass this testing because I did not have a course on the history of Kazakhstan at school and in this way it might somehow influence the status of the Kazakhstani school I study in. Then I passed KTA at the university on my own but there you are not given a chance of winning a scholarship whatever score you have. That is why I had to attend the preparatory course and prepare for passing UNT during one year (Sholpan)

There were three respondents who studied in Kazakhstani schools; two of them indicated that they did not experience supportive relation and positive attitude from school teachers. On the contrary, Aset said: “No, they seem to be very similar and they understand that it is hard for us as we came from China” regards teachers at the school and university level. Notably, Galiya expressed her thoughts about university teachers by saying:

I cannot say that they helped a lot but they conducted lessons and gave us tasks and help in such way. In other way, it is not a school to teach us how to write but they were mostly understandable

By this quote an interviewee highlights that it is not a university teacher's responsibility to teach returnee students how to write and read using a new script for them, Cyrillic. That is the case when returnee students want to highlight their own responsibility in shifting their membership to the core of a new CoP. According to her opinion, university staff do their best to help them. In general, it was difficult for students to suggest further help to promote returnee students' participation.

Summarizing all points mentioned above, self-identification, and identities ascribed by others as well as power relations existing in a new CoP usually trigger tensions between new and old members of community. 'Novice' members might ascribe their own identities but 'veteran' members who stay in more powerful positions influence newcomers' identities as well. Thus, returnee students, in some cases, negotiate their membership and participation in the social setting of a new community by ascribing 'sociable identities' or negotiating their linguistic behavior in order to become a core member of a new CoP. The analysis of identities ascribed by the members of the host community (old members) shows that labeling and negative attitudes of 'veteran' members impede returnee students' participation relegating them to the peripheral or even marginal positions. In the academic sphere, teaching staff's positive relations and support shapes and promote newcomers' membership to the core of a new CoP. On the contrary, negative attitudes of teachers hinder novices' transition from the periphery to core membership.

### **Factors supporting the transition of returnee students from peripheral to core membership**

My data highlights three factors that facilitate returnees in their transition towards core membership. These include older and more experienced returnees, support from teaching staff and university administration and self-learning.

More experienced returnees whether they are their friends, relatives or acquaintances play a significant role in supporting returnee students in their journey of participation. Returnee students form their own community based on shared experience, background and challenges rely on each other to cope with difficulties raised in their academic life.

Sustaining relationships with other members of an old CoP to increase academic performance was reported by three participants. These participants indicated that they ask for advice in adapting their writing and reading from more experienced returnees. Sholpan mentioned:

My older cousin moved to Kazakhstan earlier than us and he taught me how to write. So I worked on my writing the whole nights and it was hard. So I managed to write in Cyrillic script within a month with the help of my cousin. I read articles, books and write an alphabet

Because her relative went through the same problems he shared the way he learnt with his recently returned peer. Similarly, Togzhan said: "There were some girls who also returned from China at their early ages, they helped me with advice". In case of this student, she refers to more experienced returnee students who live in the dormitory with her. One more student Asset was familiar with difficulties that he would encounter after entering university from his relatives who had moved earlier to Kazakhstan. That is why he decided to come beforehand in summer. He emphasized:

I remember before entering school in Kazakhstan I come at the summer holidays and there were my relatives and their children who have already went through this process and they taught me writing before starting my study there



Obviously, returnee students refer to the members of old CoP as they can support them by guiding and mentoring in both academic and social domains.

Generally speaking, returnee students received a variety of help in their academic life from teachers as well, namely by giving additional learning materials and personal instruction, providing correction and giving an opportunity for self-correction, changing tasks and form of exams, offering courses mostly in language subjects. For instance, according to Asset there were many cases when teachers allowed returnees to work on and analyze their mistakes:

For example, when we write an essay there are many mistakes but teachers do not put marks at once they give us an opportunity to work on these mistakes and make corrections. Actually, there were many such cases

Changing the tasks is a widely used strategy of language teachers, for example Marat explained: "They gave us adapted tasks according to our language level. And in case of exams we passed it like other students". It means that teachers bearing in mind returnee students' level of language competence tried to select tasks relevant to them. Similarly, Asset added: "*if* I was not able to keep pace with writing lectures I was permitted to complete it at home or to write it in Arabic script".

Another way, teachers supported repatriated students in language subjects was by adapting the form and content of examination. All participants except one who moved to Kazakhstan much earlier passed oral form of exams but not test as local students. Galiya reported:

In case of exams also I was not able to write in Kazakh in Cyrillic script and my teachers gave me sympathetic consideration. I wrote what I know in this way.

Another thing when we had exams of Russian and English there was written form adapted specially for me. Usually we have exams in the form of testing and my

level of knowledge was not appropriate for this that is why they created some questions for me, these questions were in a written form and easier in comparison with locals. And I passed most parts orally

It seems that teachers were very familiar with the situation of returnees in their linguistic competence so they adapted their own strategies to cope with such difficulties. As returnee students experience initial challenges in writing and reading in Cyrillic script many teachers suggest them to attend courses outside a university which is provided according to the government initiative on a free basis in one state library of the city. One general comment on this is: "Did they help? mmm... they like offered us courses outside which we can attend to improve our Russian and English proficiency. So they showed the ways to cope with our problems". Additionally, some teachers showed emotional and psychological support while teaching languages so they tried to motivate these newcomers towards studying languages which is also a significant help.

Despite help received from university teachers returnee students also attend a preparatory course which is provided as a basis for entering and studying at the university. This preparatory course lasts one year and includes studying five subjects as physics, math, math literacy, reading literacy, and one elective subject. Three of returnees prepared for the university by attending this course; their opinion was mostly positive:

It was helpful in terms of study and some grants were distributed among returnee students which were great but there were no other help. In general, it is ok I think they do their best (Marat)

From my point of view there is a preparatory course for returnee students in our university. I think it is really helpful. I also attended it at the first year and people who work there are very supporting (Galiya)

However, one student Togzhan indicated that it also does not prepare them to go through initial need of transition from periphery to the core of community's practice:

When I came first I did not notice such big differences because I studied mostly with other returnees who came from China or Mongolia during the preparatory year. We understood each other well, we knew our languages well. There were not any problems. Then when I started my first year at the university I saw and realized the difference as I started to study with citizens of Kazakhstan who were born and have been living there so at that time I noticed that I could not speak Kazakh appropriate, understand or explain something. So it took almost two years to adjust to the environment, especially I struggled during my first year of university study

Obviously, this participant emphasized that initially all novice members were exposed to the same environment in the preparatory course as they had to study together. As a result, they were not able to acquire and share the experience and practice of old members in a new CoP. This also impedes their full participation at the initial stages of arrival.

Furthermore, almost all participants tried to find different self-learning strategies in acquiring language competence. Zhanar indicated that she was taught by tutors at the beginning and then after she managed how to learn by her own she worked on her writing and reading without any outside help. Another student Asset emphasized that one strategy which he used was watching videos from Youtube both in Russian and English; these videos are not those devoted for learning purposes but to entertain a user. The rest of students attended a variety of paid language courses to learn Russian and English and they achieved relatively good results. Furthermore, some of them talked about preferring more to attend the English language courses to Russian because almost everyone in their surrounding now speak Russian and they are exposed to Russian on everyday basis.

When asked what kind of support would help them, most returnee students could not provide clear suggestions. However, respondents shared their views on the significance of supportive relations between teachers and students and the ways teachers might assist their participation from being a passive to active member of a new community. A common view amongst returnees is that teachers are those who understand and support them both in academic and social issues at the university level. Advisors also play a significant role in their membership according to one student as there might be some misunderstandings with other university teachers who do not understand peculiarities of returnee students' background. Additionally, some of them thought that building good social relationships with surrounding people might be really beneficial. Togzhan assumed:

I think teachers should treat us as other local students I mean they should not put us down and it is very helpful when they are willing to help us. If there are good relationships with teachers, group mates I can participate well I think

Another point suggested by most students was giving them an appropriate amount of time to get used to the new community and environment. The shared position on this point is reflected by this extract:

I think returnee students need time to adjust to the environment. They should not put pressure on students asking the questions like: Why do not you know? Why do not you learn? Etc. we should be given time

Similarly, this student is talking about oppressed position of returnee learners in case when teachers assess their knowledge and skills at the same level as local students. Their linguistic and cultural background is not taken into account that might decrease returnees' motivation to learning and hinder their further development in academic career.

Overall, the factors that support - returnee students transition from the periphery to the core of a new CoP include sustaining relationships with more experienced members

of their old CoP, receiving assistance from teaching staff and university administration as well as adapting self-learning strategies in the academic domain.

**Summary:**

This chapter presented major findings of the present study aimed to explore returnee students' experience in negotiating their participation and membership in a new environment of Kazakhstan. The findings were organized into three sections: linguistic background of returnee students and their participation, self-identification and ascribed identities by other members, factors supporting full participation of returnee students. The study revealed that transition of returnee students to the full participation in a new CoP is not a linear process as their level of participation in different setting varies due to newcomers' initial challenges in three languages: Kazakh, Russian, and English. These challenges affect their participation in both academic and social life. Additionally, returnee students' membership is largely shaped by self-identification of returnee students as members of a new CoP, the kinds of 'images' teaching staff, university administration, local students, and other members of a new community create for them. Thus, in order to engage better in a new CoP returnee students form their own community including their relatives and friends who have gone through the same process of transition. That is reinforced by teaching staff, university administration's support and their own efforts to be fitted in the new CoP.

## Chapter 5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how Chinese-Kazakh returnee students participate and negotiate their identities in a new CoP of Kazakhstan from the perspective of Community of Practice framework. This was addressed through three research questions, namely: 1) What is the connection between language and the level of participation in a new CoP in Kazakhstan in HEIs?; 2) In what ways returnee students' participation in a new CoP is shaped by self' and ascribed identities?; 3) What other factors contribute to the promotion of returnee students transition from the periphery to the core of a new CoP In this chapter, I provide a discussion of analysis by summarizing the main themes emerging from interviews with seven participants in relation to the conceptual framework and previous studies. In doing so, I address the research questions posed initially.

### **Language and participation in a new CoP in the Kazakhstani environment**

Research question 1 explored the ways returnee students' language competency influences their level of participation in academic and social life in three linguistic communities in Kazakhstan – Kazakh, Russian and English.

**Finding 1.** Newcomers' (returnees) trajectory of participation is unique and varies in different settings and different linguistic communities due to language barriers affecting their level of participation in a new Community of Practice.

At the initial stage of their entry into and participation in the new CoP, most of participants maintained 'peripheral' membership in their academic setting due to their language constraints in Kazakh. Thus, Chinese-Kazakh returnee students reported that although they were bilingual and the Kazakh language was their first language, they experienced difficulties in understanding and adapting to different dialects, accents and a script used in the Kazakhstani context. Additionally, at the beginning of their arrival it also

affected their speaking skills in Kazakh. As a result, these students spent more time on completing writing and reading assignments in their academic life which to some extent impeded their full participation in a new CoP.

This is in support with the current literature suggesting that international and returnee students in their integration usually encounter language barriers in understanding different accents and dialects that trigger challenges in their academic life (Hanwei et al., 2017; Ma, 2010). More importantly, as the majority of respondents refer to having such language challenges in the academic setting only at the initial stages that highlights the need of support at this very time. The revealed findings also corroborates the framework of this study suggesting a strong need in adapting the practice of a newcomer according to new CoP's norms, needs and activity (Handley et al., 2006; Wenger, 2000). Thus, in order to maintain full participation in the academic setting within new community, returnees have to adapt their linguistic practice of the Kazakh language use according to the norms and practice of the host country.

On the other hand, in terms of participating in the social sphere in Kazakh language, returnee students acted as 'core' members because of shared repertoire with other local students, namely language proficiency in spoken Kazakh. My study shows that returnee students' participation alternate between peripheral and core membership within academic and social spheres in the Kazakh language upon their initial entry into the new CoP.

However, outside university when discourse is in the Russian language they stay on the 'periphery' due to their low language proficiency in Russian which is a widely spoken language in their new CoP. In terms of social adjustment, newcomers mostly were challenged due to their language barrier in Russian. For the majority of participants,

socializing was difficult outside university as in some cases they had to speak Russian but within their university CoP the shared language was Kazakh. Thus, students reported about their experience feeling of anxiety, low self-confidence, and helplessness in their everyday practice because of language incompetence in Russian. This finding is consistent with the previous finding which suggests that language incompetence decrease 'novice' members' self-esteem that deprives them from building and gaining from social relationships with 'more-experienced' participants of a community (Beaven & Oatey, 2016).

On the contrary, the findings on the limited use of linguistic and cultural repertoire of returnee students show inconsistency with the previous studies on the value of linguistically and culturally diverse students as 'assets' in the classroom (Gray & Gabriel, 2018; Morita, 2004). Returnee students' previous background and experience is not reflected in the academic setting what is suggested to be effective for promotion of full participation in a new community. Almost all participants expressed that they do not use their linguistic repertoire fully neither in everyday life nor in academic setting. Though all of them are proficient in Chinese and some in Arabic or Uyghur language as their L3, they do not have opportunities to use, refer and integrate their previous academic background in a new CoP. The exception was only one student who indicated his experience of working as a translator of Chinese outside the university. Additionally, students reported that teachers do not refer to their linguistic repertoire or previous academic background and knowledge. This finding is inconsistent with the previous studies that posit the importance of considering novice members' prior knowledge and experience as well as personal background that is a predictor and facilitator of further promotion of newcomer's participation in practice of a new CoP (Campbell et al., 2009; Dewey, 1993).

In general, this finding of the study suggest that the level of participation of newcomers largely depends on shared repertoire or 'artifacts' with old members of CoP, in



this case it is language competence. Additionally, these findings demonstrated that new members can be 'core' participants of one CoP but maintaining 'peripheral' membership in other CoP simultaneously. Consequently, the participation of returnee students is not a linear process that gradually improves because the level of participation is presented in a variety of settings differently. Participants in this study represent 'core' membership in social settings within their university, although they stay on the periphery referring to academic life at the initial stages and in social setting outside university's CoP.

### **'Self' and ascribed identification and membership in a new CoP**

Research Question 2 explored the ways returnee students identify themselves as members of a new CoP and other people's perspectives on these returnee students influencing their membership.

**Finding 2.** Social integration and identification of returnee students in a new CoP largely depends on intrapersonal relations with their peers, group mates, teachers and other people and their attitudes towards returnees.

In this case, two newcomers reflected on their 'achieved identities' (Palmer, 2007) as a way of negotiating and proposing their desired identities to old members of a new CoP. One of the respondents indicated that being a sociable person supported her participation and enabled establishing relationships with old members in a new community. Another participant claimed about negotiating two identities: the first one in the CoP in the Chinese context and second in Kazakhstani CoP. It is assumed that the main reason for such identification is that she was only one participant who has currently a citizenship of China and who came to Kazakhstan only for educational purposes. Thus, she adapts her linguistic behavior by avoiding the usage of a dialect and accent particular to the Kazakhstani environment when she moves to China and vice versa. In other words, she

adapts her use of language in different contexts in ways that enables her to maintain a core membership in each CoP. In this way, language is presented as a tool that demonstrates newcomers' membership and belonging to a CoP. According to this participant, she makes such adaptation in the language use intentionally to be treated equally with others and not be recognized as a 'returnee'. However, it is worth noting that usually it depends on more-experienced members who can reject and accept such kind of achieved identities based on their beliefs and their level of awareness (Dajnoki et al., 2017). Nevertheless, it shows that in some cases newcomers negotiate their identities in accordance with the norms, needs and practice of a new CoP.

Identities assigned by the old members of a new CoP also hugely shapes returnee students membership. Despite reporting mostly positive experience in building relationships with other members of a community, some participants indicated that they encountered feelings of 'labelling' and 'otherness' from their peers and group mates. These ascribed identities push less-experienced members to 'marginal' position in a new CoP. Consequently, such labeling influenced newcomers' self-esteem negatively and made them defensive in communication with locals. It is partially supported by the findings about foreign students maintaining marginal positions that affects and decreases their socialization within a new CoP because of peer and other members' perceptions (Tchon and Mertan, 2018). However, in some cases returnee students may connect such negative experience in socializing with locals' behavior and personal qualities which consequently will not have any impact on their self-esteem (Lopez and Bui, 2014). Thus, some participants also shared such points of view indicating personal qualities as a factor for such negative attitudes. Another reason for unwillingness to accept newcomers according to several studies is connected to the lack of veteran members' awareness and intercultural sensitivity (Dajnoki et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017). This is also inconsistent with the

previous findings that refer labeling of returnee students by 'old' members of a community due to their incompetence in Russian. However, according to the respondents of this study such labeling is not connected to their language barriers.

Students described their relationships with teaching staff as mostly positive at the university CoP, although those students who had experience of studying at school noted negative attitudes of teachers. Newcomers explained that such negative attitudes of teachers relate to the treatment and assessment of returnee students equally with locals without bearing in mind difference in their linguistic and academic background. That is consistent with previous studies suggesting that usually teachers fail in addressing the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students (Lin, 2008). Additionally, one student pointed out that the discrepancy in their knowledge in terms of context, subjects and language might affect their graduation test results which makes teachers as well as administration of school treat returnees also as 'a threat' to the status of school. Therefore, most of returnees tried to learn to write and read before starting their school year in Kazakhstan through self-learning strategies.

By contrast, students' integration in university CoP in the academic carrier was facilitated by the teachers' help and understanding. It is interesting to point out that students emphasized that they received much support mostly referring to language subjects which were the most challenging area for them. Teachers used several strategies such as providing newcomers with additional learning materials, personal instructions, corrections and giving space for self-corrections, changing the form of tasks and exams, providing information on courses in language subjects. In general, students expressed that they received enough support in a university CoP in their academic career. This aspect also is in line with the past findings that suggest that when teaching staff is involved in the creation

of supporting and trustful relationships with newcomers it provides better participation of novices in a new place (Bird, 2017; Frisby & Martin, 2010; Wilson et al., 2010).

The findings of my study support previous studies about the significance of internal leadership within a CoP (Wenger, 1998), a role of 'a moderator' (a teacher) in facilitating the integration of newcomer in a new CoP (Kleem & Connell, 2004), and the intrapersonal relationships between less-experienced (newcomers) and more-experienced (locals) members in shaping newcomers' participation and membership in a new CoP (Amos & Rehorst, 2018; Yan & Pei, 2018). Thus, negative attitudes of locals may be the reason of keeping newcomers in the marginal position in a new CoP as well as supporting atmosphere created by teachers and group mates can promote newcomers' transition from periphery to the core of a new CoP.

### **Factors promoting returnee students transition from the periphery to the core of a new CoP in Kazakhstan**

This section discusses the main factors that support returnee students' membership as well as their suggestions towards engaging in a new community fully.

**Finding 3.** In order to adjust academically in a new CoP of university, newcomers (returnee students) form their own CoP unintentionally where they share and gain knowledge from more-experienced returnee students who might be their friends or family members. On the other hand, the study indicates that support received from 'veteran' members of a new CoP is of a great importance too.

Based on interviews, the majority of participants rely on other returnee students who came to Kazakhstan earlier and represent 'old' members of university CoP with similar academic and cultural background and experience as these new members. This collaboration and interaction with the representatives of their own returnees' CoP assisted

them in finding ways to overcome challenges in academic domain of a new environment.

This finding is also reported in studies by Binsahl et al. (2015), El Khoury & Usman (2018), Fayzullina (2019), Metro-Roland (2018) about the importance of sustaining relationships with previous CoP for international, immigrant, and returnee students.

Moreover, some newcomers prepare before their departure by asking information about possible difficulties and how to manage them in the academic setting. In some cases, more experienced returnee students shared with new members the learning strategies of writing and reading in Cyrillic alphabet.

These findings are in line with those of the previous studies (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009) suggesting that being a member of a parallel CoP of international students effect newcomers' academic and social performance positively. According to this finding, newcomers do not require building social and academic rapport closely with local students to perform successfully in academic setting if they form and participate in their own CoP. By contrast, these findings suggest that a lack of communication and cooperation with newcomers put local students in disadvantageous position because in this way they are limited in developing global perspectives. On the other hand, there are also limitations of such participation because close and frequent interactions with the representatives of an old CoP can restrict participation of newcomers in a new CoP. Similar issues have been reported in studies of Poteet and Gomez (2015) and Lim and Pham (2016) who argue that along with benefits high frequency of interactions with members of an old CoP triggers isolation of novices in new CoP.

One possible reason that lies behind creating their own CoP of returnee students might be a lack of assistance from the university administration (Blankers et al. 2018; Clement et al., 2003), however, most of the previous research posit that newcomers usually tend to build their own CoP because of shared practice, domain, experience and challenges

and their desire to overcome them successfully (El Khoury & Usman, 2018; Janson & Howard, 2004; Kalocsai, 2009; Linehan & McCarthy, 2001; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Palmer, 2015). Therefore, building a parallel CoP of returnee students is one way that makes their membership full and participation active.

In case of 'old' members in a new CoP the most influential are teachers and university administration. Thus, the analysis shows that teaching staff make a variety of adaptations to facilitate returnee students experience in dealing with academic issues, especially in language subjects. Thus, teachers change their teaching practice according to the needs of returnee students based on their previous academic and linguistic background. As a result, teachers refer to the previous knowledge of newcomers implicitly to develop and modify their tasks, approaches and strategies during the lessons. However, as it was mentioned before they do not make connections to the background of students explicitly. The importance of making bridges between previous and new knowledge of new members is supported by several fundamental theories and studies (Campbell et al., 2009; Dewey, 1993). Besides, by changing their teaching practice teachers supported returnees in practical issues of their academic career. This finding supports claims of Chuah and Singh (2016) who found that one of the most significant assistance from the perspective of new members refer to practical issues.

University administration provided initial help for making returnee students' transition smooth by offering a preparatory course which lasts one year. During this course new members are required to learn the basics of five main subjects included in Unified National Testing. After finishing this course and taking the test returnee students have an opportunity to win a scholarship for studying in any higher educational institution of Kazakhstan. University administration informs students about requirements of entering higher educational establishment and supports them during this transition. The issue of

university's ongoing support and information provision have been reported by Calder et al. (2016), Cameron (2016), and Chen (2007) who emphasize these aspects as the major contribution in newcomers' further participation in academic and social spheres. However, it seems that novice members are deprived from emotional and social support of locals whether they are peers, teachers or university administration that is also essential for negotiating their memberships.

To summarize, factors that contribute to the transition of returnee students from the periphery to the core of a new CoP include sustaining relationships with members of their old CoP as well as with the 'veteran' members of their new CoP. The major roles in supporting and hindering returnee students transition among old members of a new CoP of Kazakhstan is played by university administration and teaching staff and local students. Similarly, old members of an old CoP of China, namely more experienced returnee students as peers and relatives can facilitate newcomers' membership, especially in academic setting.

## Chapter 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how returnee students negotiate their participation in academic and social spheres in the new environment of Kazakhstan. Since no research has been conducted on the issue of newcomers' participation from the perspective of Community of Practice theory developed by Lave and Wenger (1991), my research reveals how returnee students' membership is established in different settings in the multilingual context of Kazakhstan.

This concluding chapter of the thesis summarizes major findings of the study, ending with how these outcomes are meaningful for future implications. Based on a literature review of empirical and theoretical studies, this research addressed three main questions which include: 1) linguistic background of returnee students and its influence on their level of participation; 2) self-identification and ascribed identities; 3) factors contributing to the promotion of returnees' transition from periphery to the core in a new CoP.

This study considers the journey of returnee students and how they engage in a new environment starting from the time they come back from China to Kazakhstan. During this journey, returnee students are involved in a variety of establishments as schools and universities; they are engaged in creating friendship, family, peers, student – teacher, and student-university's bonds. All these interactions with the members of a new CoP need participation which can be peripheral, full or marginal in some cases. In other words, participation does not usually hinge on returnee students' motivation or desire to become core participants but it is mutually negotiated by all members represented by locals and returnees.



In the Kazakhstani context, returnee students are required to know Kazakh, Russian and English languages but in most cases these newcomers encounter challenges because of different linguistic situation in China. Being ethnic Kazakhs almost all participants are competent in Kazakh but have low proficiency in Russian, whilst their competency in English is rather variable. These language challenges affect returnee students' life at academic and social levels whether it is at school, university, or any environment of a new CoP therefore it is crucial to assist these novice members in acquiring the existing shared practice of trilingualism.

Upon arrival to Kazakhstan, returnee students have already developed sets of knowledge of culture, languages, social standards appropriate to the Chinese context that is why they are perceived as relatively 'different' from locals. Therefore, local people in the Kazakhstani context play a direct role in promoting returnee students' participation. The findings of this study revealed that returnee students meet and interact at everyday basis mostly with teachers, peers, group mates, and other people who create a variety of images of these returnee students. Depending on whether these images are negative or positive, they hinder or foster returnee students' participation. Despite such kind of challenges, returnee students are assisted by other more-experienced returnee students, local teachers, students and university staff.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

Based on the findings of the current research there are a number of implications for policy makers, university administration, and teaching staff.

Regards policy-makers, the findings of the study demonstrate that there is a need to provide initial support for returnee students in adapting to the norms and standards of the Kazakh language used in the Kazakhstani context. Moreover, policy makers are

recommended to take into account low competency in Russian of newcomers that effect their participation negatively in academic and social life. Since returnee students cannot be fully engaged in the social settings of a new environment due to a lack of competence in Russian, it further might impact their employment rate and economic status. Thus, it is suggested to provide additional language courses to facilitate newcomers' membership in Russian discourse.

As for university administration and teaching staff, it is recommended to provide initiatives of raising teachers and other students' multicultural and multilingual awareness and intercultural sensitivity, particularly at the school level. In order to avoid and prevent the 'marginal' or 'exclusive' positions of returnee learners and promote their successful participation within a new environment it is suggested to build a supportive atmosphere in a new CoP. General support might be reinforced by building a parallel CoP on a voluntary membership within a university where novices can share their experience, troubles and suggestions in coping challenges in their academic or social life. Thus, according to the outcomes of the study returnee students do not receive much emotional and psychological support that can also be solved by forming returnees' CoP within a university.

Teaching staff can gain better understanding of the nature of returnee students' participation in social and academic settings as well as the nature of returnee students' relationships with other members of a new CoP. In other words, this study provides insights into the ways to foster and increase the level of participation of newcomers and the ways to promote an equal opportunity for participation for students with different linguistic and cultural background. In addition, as most participants reported that teachers rarely refer to their previous knowledge and their linguistic potential to a greater extent it is also recommended for language teachers to include tasks and approaches aiming to increase plurilingual and pluricultural competence among learners.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

As the study revealed that in some cases teaching staff have relatively negative attitudes towards returnee students at the school level it is suggested to conduct further research on teaching staff and local students' perspectives on returnees in the secondary education. Moreover, it is suggested to conduct similar study on returnee students' participation in different settings by applying observational or ethnographic approaches which can be helpful in providing more useful insights of this phenomenon.

### **Final reflections on the study**

The narration of the journey of returnee students' participation would be incomplete without reflecting on my own journey as a researcher in conducting this study. At first sight, it seems that thesis writing is all about keeping a track of the structure of your thesis by starting from writing your introduction, literature review and other parts finishing by your concluding thoughts and implications. However, during my own experience I realized that thesis writing is more about ongoing process of making changes as your thoughts are evolved and developed gradually. Initially, I applied the concept of 'integration' to my study and conduct an extensive review of literature on this framework. Then I gave this concept up after starting to read more literature on the CoP concept which gave me new insights for my study. The CoP lens enabled me to look at my study from different perspectives, as well as necessitating looking at the reviewed literature again through the framework of CoP. Furthermore, I had to rephrase my research questions so that they could be aligned with the scope of the applied framework. Thus, rather than following a linear process of thesis writing as starting from introduction, literature review, then describing methodological part, and completing other parts I had to make some huge changes revisiting the main parts of the study.

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## Appendix A

### Interview protocol №1

#### Background information

##### Introduction:

*Purpose of the study:*

**The purpose** of this qualitative study is to explore returnee students' experiences of academic and social adjustment in multilingual environment of Kazakhstan at the tertiary level. The study participants will be selected among undergraduate returnee students who are ethnically Kazakhs and came from China. It will be conducted in Shakarim State University of East Kazakhstan, Semei city. The current study will focus on how returnee students adjust academically and socially to the promotion of three languages (Kazakh, Russian, and English) in higher educational institutions of Kazakhstan.

#### Linguistic and cultural background

- Which languages do you speak? What was the medium of instruction at your school?
- How long have you lived and studied in China? Can you tell us a little about your background?
- Language preference
  - Which language do you prefer for everyday conversations?
  - Which language do you use for talking with your friends? Group mates?
  - Which language do you use at home?
- Did you have any challenges in terms of language in studying when you have entered university?
- Do you have any problems in terms of language in communication with friends, teachers, group mates?
- Have you studied the English language before (in China)?
- Are there any differences between the Kazakh language spoken in Kazakhstan and China?
- How well do you know the Russian language?
- Are there any other challenges despite language and culture?

##### Support:

- Do teachers know about the level of your language (Kazakh, Russian, English) proficiency or any related challenges?
- If you have any challenges what kind of coping strategies do you or your teachers use?
- What sort of help do you need in order to adjust better (from the teachers or from the university administration)?

## Appendix B

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Charting returnee students' journey through Community of Practice of Kazakhstan

#### DESCRIPTION:

You are invited to take part in a research study on the topic of Kazakh-Chinese returnee students' adjustment aimed to explore returnee students' experiences of academic and social adjustment in multilingual environment of Kazakhstan at the tertiary level. You were selected as a research participant because of your experience as a student who returned to Kazakhstan with different linguistic and cultural background. This research will involve your participation in an interview that will take about 60 minutes.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and it is your own choice whether to participate or not. You may change your mind and refuse to participate in this study even if you have agreed earlier. The choice that you make will have no bearing on your study or any study-related evaluations. In case you do not have any desire to answer a question during the interview, you may not respond to it.

The interview will take place in the classroom provided by the university administration in Shakarim State University of Semey. Interview will be face-to-face that is why no one else but the interviewer and interviewee will be present during the process of interview. With your consent, the interview will be recorded using a voice recorder and transcribed later. The information taken during the interview will be confidential and no-one will be identified by names. All the files will be stored in the researcher's personal laptop. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the data. Audio-recordings of interviews will be destroyed after a month. To protect your identity and personal information your name will be intentionally coded. For instance, you will be assigned number as *Student 1* or *Student 2* etc.

The findings of research will be included in the final report and might be used for publications or conferences. Confidentiality is guaranteed by the researcher through the use of a coding system.

**TIME INVOLVEMENT:** Your participation in the interview will take approximately 60 minutes.

#### RISKS AND BENEFITS:

There are no potential risks in this study as the data will be collected through face-to-face interviews, and no sensitive information related to your personal life will be touched on.

Confidentiality will be guaranteed and only codes (Student 1, Student 2, etc.) will be used in the report.

Potential benefits of this study might be an opportunity to reflect on your experience of adjustment. The findings would be also useful in identifying the ways to promote better academic and social adjustment of returnee students. Revealing possible challenges and coping strategies will give educators and policy-makers better understanding of how to support students like yourself.

### **PARTICIPANT RIGHTS:**

There is no need to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so. Your choice regarding participation will not affect your study or study-related evaluations in any way. You may stop your participation in the interview at any time that you wish. You will be given an opportunity at the end of the interview/discussion to review your remarks; if you do not agree with my notes you can ask to modify it or omit if I did not understand you correctly.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION:**

**Questions:** If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this student work,

**Independent Contact:** If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NUGSE Research Committee to speak to someone independent of the research team at +7 7172 709359. You can also write an email to the NUGSE Research Committee at [gse\\_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz](mailto:gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz)

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.**

**According to the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan an individual under the age of 18 is considered a child. Any participant falling into that category should be given the Parental Consent Form and have it signed by at least one of his/her parent(s) or guardian(s).**



**ЗЕРТТЕУ ЖҰМЫСЫ КЕЛІСІМІНІҢ АҚПАРАТТЫҚ ФОРМАСЫ****(қатысушы студенттер үшін)****Тақырыбы: Қазақстанның көп тілділік ортасында Қытайдан келген репатрианттардың әлеуметтік және академиялық жағынан бейімделуі****СИПАТТАМА:**

Сіз Қазақстанның көп тілділік ортасында Қытайдан келген репатрианттардың академиялық және әлеуметтік бейімделу тәжірибесін қарастыру үшін, бағытталған зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға шақырылып отырсыз. Сіз Қазақстанға оралған, лингвистикалық және мәдени тиістілікке ие болғандықтан, қатысушы ретінде таңдалдыңыз.

Сіздің сұхбатта қатысуыңыз шамамен 60 минуттай уақытыңызды алады. Сіздің қатысуыңыз ерікті түрде екенін хабарлаймыз және қалаған уақытта зерттеу жұмысына қатысу туралы келісіміңізді кері қайтаруға немесе тоқтатуға құқығыңыз бар. Сіздің таңдауыңыз сабағыңызға немесе сабаққа қатысты бағалауға еш кесірін тигізбейді. Сондай-ақ, қандай да бір сұрақтарға жауап бермеуіңізге де әбден болады.

Сұхбат Шәкәрім атындағы Семей мемлекеттік университетінің аудиторияларының бірінде немесе басқа сізге ыңғайлы жерде өтеді. Сұхбат бетпе-бет жүргізіледі, яғни сұхбат барысында сұхбат алушы мен сұхбаттасушыдан басқа ешкім қатыспайды. Сұхбат дыбыс жазу құрылғысы арқылы жазылып, аударылады. Сұхбатта алынған ақпарат құпия болып табылады, сондықтан қатысушылардың есімдері көрсетілмейді. Барлық файлдар зерттеушінің жеке компьютерінде сақталады. Тек зерттеуші мен оның жетекшісі ақпаратқа қол жеткізе алады. Сіз туралы ақпарат және басқа да жеке деректерді қорғау үшін, сіздің толық аты-жөніңіз код арқылы жазылады. Мысалы, *Студент 1* немесе *Студент 2*.

Бұл зерттеу жұмысының нәтижелері академиялық немесе кәсіби мақсаттарда баспаға ұсынылуы немесе шығарылуы мүмкін. Қатысушының жеке деректерінің құпиялығы код жүйесін пайдалану арқылы кепілдігі беріледі.

**ҚАТЫСУ МЕРЗІМІ:** Сіздің қатысуыңыз шамамен *60 минут* уақытыңызды алады.**ЗЕРТТЕУ ЖҰМЫСЫНА ҚАТЫСУДЫҢ ҚАУІПТЕРІ МЕН АРТЫҚШЫЛЫҚТАРЫ:**

Бұл зерттеу ықтимал қауіптерді тудырмайды, өйткені ақпарат жеке сұхбаттар арқылы жиналады және жеке ақпарат ашылмайды. Құпиялық кодтау жүйесін пайдалану арқылы қамтамасыз етіледі (*Студент 1*, *Студент 2* және т.б.). Зерттеу жұмысына қатысуыңыздың артықшылығы ол бейімделу тәжірибеңізбен бөлісу. Сондай-ақ, зерттеудің нәтижелері репатриант студенттердің академиялық және әлеуметтік бейімделу жағдайларын жақсарту үшін пайдалы болады. Репатрианттардың ықтимал қиындықтары туралы ақпарат және олардың бейімделу үдерісінде әдістері мұғалімдер мен саясаткерлерге оларды қалай қолдауға болатынын және көмектесетінін түсінуге мүмкіндік береді.

**ҚАТЫСУШЫ ҚҰҚЫҚТАРЫ:**

Егер Сіз берілген формамен танысып, зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға шешім қабылдасаңыз, Сіздің қатысуыңыз **ерікті** түрде екенін хабарлаймыз. Сонымен қатар, **қалаған уақытта айыппұл төлемей және сіздің әлеуметтік жеңілдіктеріңізге еш кесірін тигізбей зерттеу жұмысына қатысу туралы келісіміңізді кері қайтаруға немесе тоқтатуға құқығыңыз бар. Зерттеу жұмысына мүлдем қатыспауыңызға да толық құқығыңыз бар.** Сондай-ақ, қандай да бір сұрақтарға жауап бермеуіңізге де әбден болады. Бұл зерттеу жұмысының нәтижелері академиялық немесе кәсіби мақсаттарда баспаға ұсынылуы немесе шығарылуы мүмкін.

**БАЙЛАНЫС АҚПАРАТЫ:**

**Сұрақтарыңыз:** Егер жүргізіліп отырған зерттеу жұмысының процесі, қаупі мен артықшылықтары туралы сұрағыңыз немесе шағымыңыз болса, келесі байланыс құралдары арқылы зерттеушінің магистрлық тезисі бойынша жетекшісімен хабарласуыңызға болады. (*Naureen Durrani*, [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) )

**ДЕРБЕС БАЙЛАНЫС АҚПАРАТТАРЫ:**

Егер берілген зерттеу жұмысының жүргізілуімен қанағаттанбасаңыз немесе сұрақтарыңыз бен шағымдарыңыз болса, Назарбаев Университеті Жоғары Білім беру мектебінің Зерттеу Комитетімен көрсетілген байланыс құралдары арқылы хабарласуыңызға болады: электрондық поштамен [gse\\_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz](mailto:gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz).

Зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға келісіміңізді берсеңіз, берілген формаға қол қоюыңызды сұраймыз.

- Мен берілген формамен мұқият таныстым;
- Маған зерттеу жұмысының мақсаты мен оның процедурасы жайында толық ақпарат берілді;
- Жинақталған ақпарат пен құпия мәліметтерге тек зерттеушінің өзіне қолжетімді және мәлім болатынын толық түсінемін;
- Мен кез келген уақытта ешқандай түсініктемесіз зерттеу жұмысына қатысудан бас тартуыма болатынын түсінемін;
- Мен жоғарыда аталып өткен ақпаратты саналы түрде қабылдап, осы зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға өз келісімімді беремін.

Қолы: \_\_\_\_\_

Күні: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### *Data Sample*

Transcript [translated from Kazakh] of the interview with Galiya about her experience of negotiating her participation

Interviewer: what is the medium of instruction of your program?

Galiya: Kazakh language

Interviewer: What is your major?

Galiya: Agronomy

Interviewer: Which course are you studying in?

Galiya: 4<sup>th</sup> course, this year I am going to graduate.

Interviewer: Are you a self-paid student or you receive a grant(scholarship)?

Galiya: I am a self-paid student.

Interviewer: which languages do you have and what language proficiency do you have?

Galiya: I know Kazakh language as it is my mother tongue, Chinese proficiency is about 80%, however, Russian and English languages I can use for basic conversations but regards texts and information it is harder.

Interviewer: what was the medium of instruction at your school?

Galiya: Kazakh and Chinese.

Interviewer: How long have you lived and studied in China?

Galiya: I am currently live in China and come to Kazakhstan to study at university.

Interviewer: Are you going to move to Kazakhstan?

Galiya: It is not known.