

**Exploring Kazakhstani Master's Students' Language Learning Experiences and  
Strategy Uses in an English-Medium University in Kazakhstan: A Qualitative Inquiry**

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October 2019

Dear Gulmira Batyrkhanova,

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You may proceed with contacting your preferred research site and commencing your participant recruitment strategy.

Yours sincerely

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Dedicating this work to my younger self who unintentionally started to learn English on her own at the age of 12 because of her great passion for music, wanting to understand what her favorite musicians were singing about in English (I still keep the lyrics with translations of all the High School Musical, Miley Cyrus, Usher, Maroon 5, One Republic, and many other songs. I still know them by heart). By choosing to explore language learning strategies and experiences, I was excited to connect with people who have similar stories like mine. Thank you to my 11 participants for being part of this.

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### **Abstract**

#### **Exploring Kazakhstani Master's Students' Language Learning Experiences and Strategy Uses in an English-Medium University in Kazakhstan: A Qualitative Inquiry**

More than four decades have passed since the language learning strategy (LLS) concept was first highlighted by Joan Rubin (1975). Most previous LLS research was based on the cognitivist theoretical framework and conducted using survey tools that failed to capture language learners' "situated learning experiences" by focusing on the frequency and expressing their preferences for strategy use, rather than on its dynamic nature and development. Considering the above and the fact that no previous LLS research has been conducted in Kazakhstan, the present qualitative study represents the first empirical study that unravels a group of 11 masters students' diverse linguistic and academic challenges, their strategic learning efforts and learning goals while attempting to improve their English proficiency and meet the demands of their academic program at one Kazakhstani English-Medium of Instruction (EMI) university. Using narrative writing and individual semi-structured interviews, the mediating role of various contextual conditions (e.g., teaching practices, level of parental involvement, peers' mediation, and the availability of technologies) was examined according to the following research questions: 1) What are the particular patterns of learning strategies used by the participants? 2) What influenced the participants' choices and use of strategies? The findings presented the nature of the participants' strategy use and development as they responded to the changes in their learning goals, and described their past language learning experiences. Five main themes emerged from the interview data: "past language learning experiences", "the influence of mediating social agents", "the mediating role of objects", "academic and linguistic challenges", and "learning goals". The pedagogical implications and possible research recommendations of

this study suggest providing additional Academic English support for students enrolled in EMI programs to assist them in accomplishing their desired future vision.



### Аңдатпа

#### Ағылшын Тілді Қазақстан Университетінде Қазақстандық Магистранттардың

#### Ағылшын Тілін Үйрену Тәжірибесін және Қолдану Стратегиясын Зерттеу

Джоана Рубин алғаш рет тіл үйрену стратегиясы (ТҮС) концептісін енгізгелі (1975) төрт онжылдықтан артық уақыт өтті. ТҮС бойынша алдыңғы зерттеулердің басым бөлігі когнитивистік теориялық базаға негізделіп, сауалнама арқылы жүргізілген болатын. Аталмыш сауалнамалар шет тілін үйренушілердің “белгілі бір оқу тәжірибесін” анықтай алмайтын, олардың динамикалық түрде дамып келе жатқан болмысына емес, олардың үйрену стратегияларының жиілігі мен басымдықтарына ден қоятын. Жоғарыда айтылғанның және бұған дейін Қазақстанда ТҮС жөнінде бір де бір зерттеу жүргізілмегендігін ескере отырып, осы зерттеу жұмысы 11 магистранттың әр түрлі лингвистикалық және академиялық қиындықтарын, сондай-ақ Қазақстандағы ағылшын тілінде білім беретін (АТББ) университеттің академиялық бағдарламаның талаптарын орындай отырып олардың стратегиялық күш салулары мен оқу мақсаттарын, ағылшын тілін білуін жақсартуға бағытталған талпыныстарын сипаттайтын алғашқы эмпирикалық зерттеу болып табылады. Дербес тәжірибені баяндау және жеке жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбат секілді зерттеу құралдарын пайдалана отырып, әр түрлі мәнмәтіндік жағдайлардың (мысалы, педагогикалық практикалар, ата-аналардың қатысу деңгейі, құрдастардың ықпалы, технологиялардың қолжетімділігі) ролі келесідегідей зерттеу сұрақтарына сәйкес зерттелді:

1) Қатысушылар қандай оқу стратегияларын пайдаланады? 2) Қатысушылардың белгілі бір стратегияларды таңдауына және пайдалануына не әсер етті? Алынған нәтижелер қатысушылардың тілді үйренудегі бұрынғы тәжірибесін сипаттай отырып, өздерінің оқу мақсаттарындағы өзгерістерге орай қалай әрекет еткендігі, қандай стратегияларды қолданғандары мен дамытуының сипатын қамтып көрсетті. Атап

айтқанда, барлық сұхбаттардан негізінде бес тақырып анықталды: “тілді үйренудегі бұрынғы тәжірибе”, “әлеуметтік делдалдардың ықпалы”, “ объектілердің делдалдық рөлі”, “академиялық және лингвистикалық мәселелер” және “оқу мақсаттары”. Осыған сүйене отырып, бұл зерттеудің педагогикалық және ықтимал ғылыми зерттеу жұмыстарына арналған ұсыныстары, АТББ бағдарламаларына түскен студенттерге өздерінің болашақ армандарын жүзеге асыра алуы үшін оларға ағылшын тілінің қосымша академиялық қолдауының көрсетілуі керектігін қамтиды.

### Аннотация

#### **Исследование Опыта Изучения и Стратегий Использования Английского Языка**

#### **Казахстанскими Магистрантами в Англоязычном Университете Казахстана**

Прошло более четырех десятилетий с тех пор, как концепт стратегий изучения языка (СИЯ) был впервые введен Джоаной Рубин (1975). Большинство предыдущих исследований по СИЯ были основаны на когнитивистской теоретической базе и проводились с использованием опросников и анкетирований, которые не могли охватить “определенный опыт обучения” изучающих иностранный язык, и которые сосредоточивались на частоте и предпочтениях их стратегий изучения, а не на их динамично развивающихся натуре и развитии. Исходя из вышеизложенного и того факта, что ранее в Казахстане не проводилось ни одного исследования по СИЯ, данная работа представляет собой первое эмпирическое исследование, которое описывает лингвистические и академические проблемы группы 11 магистрантов, а также их стратегические усилия и цели обучения, попытки улучшения знания английского языка, выполняя требования академической программы в Казахстанском университете с английским языком обучения (АЯО). Используя такие инструменты исследования как повествовательное описание своего опыта и индивидуальные полуструктурированные интервью, была исследована роль различных контекстуальных условий (например, педагогические практики, уровень вовлеченности родителей, влияние сверстников, доступность технологий) в соответствии со следующими исследовательскими вопросами: 1) Каковы определенные повторяющиеся элементы стратегий обучения, используемые участниками? 2) Что повлияло на выбор и использование участниками определенных стратегий? Полученные результаты отразили характер использования и развития стратегий участников по мере того, как они реагировали на изменения в своих целях

обучения, описывая прошлый опыт изучения языка. А именно, из всех интервью возникли пять основных тем: “прошлый опыт изучения языка”, “влияние посреднических социальных агентов”, “посредническая роль объектов”, “академические и лингвистические проблемы” и “цели обучения”. Исходя из этого, возможные педагогические и исследовательские рекомендации этого исследования включают в себя, например, предоставление дополнительной академической поддержки английского языка для студентов, обучающихся по программам с АЯО, чтобы они могли реализовать свое желаемое видение будущего.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

I have been learning and studying the English language since kindergarten up until now as a graduate student in one of the English-Medium of Instruction (EMI) universities in Nur-Sultan (previously Astana), the capital of Kazakhstan. In addition, I was an exchange student at an EMI university in South Korea, and have been teaching English for more than six years. In this sense, I have been surrounded by the English language throughout my life. However, as for the language learning process, secondary school education could not provide me with sufficient knowledge of English. Hence, starting from Grade 7 in secondary school, I became my own teacher: as a child I unintentionally managed to find my own language learning strategies (LLSs) that helped me acquire the English language.

As each language learner tends to adopt certain LLSs to orchestrate their language learning and development, the present qualitative study represents the first empirical study that disentangles a group of Kazakhstani master's students' diverse linguistic and academic challenges, together with their strategic learning efforts and learning goals, while attempting to improve their English proficiency and meet the demands of their academic program at one Kazakhstani EMI university. The present chapter provides background information on the languages of Kazakhstan, along with the research problem and purpose, research questions, and the significance of the study.

### Background Information

In Kazakhstan, there are three main languages that comprise the “Trinity of Languages” policy, which was initiated by the former President of Kazakhstan in 2007; the policy supposes the ability to speak in Kazakh, Russian, and English equally (Nazarbayev, 2007). That is, Kazakh and Russian are both official languages: Kazakh is considered a state language with Russian being a language for interethnic communication. English is a global language that serves as a lingua franca in the modern world (Melitz, 2016).



Furthermore, in Kazakhstani education, a gradual shift towards the English language as both a key subject and a medium of instruction is highlighted in several policy documents such as the “State program for education development 2011-2020” developed by the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) in 2011; “100 Concrete Steps” (2015), “Roadmap of Trilingual Education Development for 2015-2020” (MoES, 2015), “State program of education and science development 2016-2019” (MoES, 2016). In other words, English has not only been taught as a separate subject but is also used as a medium of instruction in some secondary schools as well as in some higher education institutions. Out of 128 universities, 42 universities offer EMI courses and programs, and this number is growing rapidly (Irsaliyev et al., 2017).

Related to this, the former president stated in his annual address to the nation: “...out of 10 million books published in the world, 85% of them are in English... Scientific knowledge, all the new developments and information are in English nowadays” (Zhumzhumina, 2013, p. 5). Therefore, if the country strives to be internationally competitive, it needs to provide its individuals with an opportunity to develop their English language proficiency across different settings (Irsaliyev et al., 2017). However, a lack of evidence on the design and delivery of curriculums in the English language in Kazakhstan, together with the insufficient number of qualified teachers that operate in the language, and a lack of guidance documentation on teaching through English (Seitzhanova, Plokhikh, Baiburiev, & Tsaregorodtseva, 2015) pose a question on how successful the EMI implementation in education has been so far.

### **Problem Statement**

With accelerated globalization and the push for internationalization across the globe, Kazakhstan introduced the multilingual education reform initiative, where English is used as a medium of instruction in a number of educational institutions. Simultaneously, one of the

problems might be that Kazakhstani teachers face difficulties in conducting classes and delivering content through the English language, which therefore has caused discomfort for students (Seitzhanova et al., 2015). In this regard, students are compelled to navigate their English language learning on their own. Moreover, according to Norton (2015), language learners are considered as “situated active agents” that tend to “question, challenge, and reposition themselves” by embracing specific language learning strategies (LLSs) to help themselves accomplish their language learning goals (as cited in Hajar, 2017, p. 251). That is, since the mid-1970s a lot of research throughout the world has been dedicated to the study of the LLSs that learners usually employ in order to enhance their language skills (Wray & Hajar, 2015). However, there is no research on the English LLSs among the students of EMI programs in the Kazakhstani context.

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

The former president of Kazakhstan emphasized the importance of being fluent in the three languages (2007), and within the framework of the academic internationalization process, the trilingual education reform initiative has been implemented, so that English has been introduced as an EMI in more than 40 universities of Kazakhstan (Zenkova & Khamitova, 2017). There has been an increasing number of published studies in Asia (e.g., Gao, 2010; Gu, 2019) concerned with individuals’ language learning experience and LLSs they employ to accomplish their learning goals. Therefore, there arose a question on where the LLSs research from Kazakhstan was. Addressing this intriguing inquiry, the qualitative research study reported in this thesis has, to an extent, redressed the above research gaps by exploring not only the challenges that Kazakhstani master’s students confront while studying in an academic program in a Kazakhstani EMI university, but also by examining these students’ use of particular strategies mediated by some influential social agents, including their module instructors and peers. Notably, the present study can be regarded as the first

opportunity for these Kazakhstani students to discuss their own challenges, strategic language efforts and learning goals while attempting to improve their English achievement and meet the demands of their academic program at one Kazakhstani university. Further, the findings of this study could offer a myriad of substantial insights to the MoES about the challenges that graduate students confront in order to meet the academic and linguistic requirements in an EMI university in Kazakhstan, underlying their strategic learning efforts.

Furthermore, while there exist empirical studies that have investigated the challenges that some non-native English-speaker teachers in Kazakhstan face when teaching through the medium of English (e.g., Seitzhanova et al., 2015), no study in Kazakhstan has explored students' diverse linguistic and academic challenges and the learning strategies they deploy while attempting to meet the requirements of their academic program and accomplish their future visions.

Simultaneously, almost all previous LLS research was quantitative using mainly Oxford's (1990) assessment tool known as Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), and such studies focused on students' frequency (and expressed preferences of learners' strategy use) rather than on students' actual use of LLSs. Therefore, this study can be seen as unique, given that it aims to capture students' actual and situated uses of LLSs in response to different contextual factors such as teachers' practices, availability of language resources, assessment methods, and cultural beliefs. In other words, this study is underpinned by a sociocultural theory on LLSs in order to understand the ongoing interactions between participants' learner agency and contextual realities in a specific setting. The concept of learner agency relates to those "who are capable of thinking, wishing and acting when they recognize the significance of a specific activity to overcome certain contextual constraints and accomplish their ultimate goals" (Hajar, 2019, p. 2). Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to explore master's students' experiences and practices with English LLSs in an EMI

program at one Kazakhstani university. Accordingly, the following research questions will be answered:

1. What are the particular patterns of learning strategies used by the participants?
2. What influenced the participants' choices and use of strategies?

### **Significance of the Study**

As already mentioned, no research on LLSs has previously been conducted in Kazakhstan. Therefore, this empirical study might be considered unique as it focuses not only on students' challenges while studying through the medium of English but also on the strategies that they deploy in order to overcome the challenges. That said, the findings of the present study could provide insightful and useful guidance to Kazakhstani university students that are thinking of pursuing their higher studies in English. Moreover, the findings could also offer insights on various academic challenges students might face during their studies, the impacts of challenges on them, and how they manage them in an EMI university in Kazakhstan. Furthermore, the present study could provide valuable insights to teachers and policymakers of Kazakhstan about the kinds of support that they can offer to these students, especially in terms of the development of competence in Academic English. In addition, unlike most previous LLSs research, this study adopts qualitative methods to capture students' actual uses of LLSs, and not only their LLSs preferences.

### **Outline of the Study**

The first chapter provides the background information of the research topic as well as it describes the research purpose and questions, and the significance of the study.

Simultaneously, the second chapter comprises the literature review on the research topic. It starts with the "Good Language Learner" Strategies (GLLSs) overview and criticisms, which are followed by the definitional issues of LLSs. In addition, some attention is given to the research methods in LLSs research along with their major criticisms. Finally, sociocultural

perspectives in LLS research are thoroughly discussed. In the third chapter I look at the methodology of the study including the research design, site and sampling, data collection and its instruments, data analysis and ethical considerations. The fourth chapter covers the main findings of the research. The fifth chapter outlines the discussion of the findings. The final chapter consists of conclusion with implications and practice on this research study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The previous chapter provided an overall background to the study: it started with the rising role of English in Kazakhstan, which has led to an increasing number of universities using English as a medium of instruction across the country. After that, the significance of conducting this research was discussed, before outlining the structure and purpose of each chapter in this thesis. This chapter sets out to explain and justify the sociocultural perspective to language learning strategy (LLS) research adopted in the present study. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on the concept of a “Good Language Learner” (GLL) and the definitional issues relevant to the construct of LLSs. The next part sheds light on the main research methods adopted in the field of LLS and relevant major criticisms directed at this field. The last part of the chapter covers the sociocultural perspective in LLS studies.

### **“Good Language Learner” Features and Strategies: Insights and Criticisms**

The initial interest in LLSs mainly emerged due to unsatisfactory results of focusing mostly on the methods and products of language teaching, supposing that “good teaching automatically” suggested “good learning” (Cohen, 2011, p. 683). In other words, it might have been supposed that if a teacher was well-qualified and perhaps had a solid reputation, it would be impossible for a student not to succeed. As Hajar (2019) argues, during 1970s, the main focus in language education was mainly on teachers and their characteristics rather than on students and their peculiarities. Consequently, in the mid-1970s, several researchers (e.g., Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978) started to develop an interest in understanding features of a GLL that were supposedly facilitating language learning process for them. As a result, these researchers were assuming that it was possible to teach specific strategies deployed by a typical GLL to less successful students, so that they

would benefit from that and become GLLs as well. However, this assumption was later criticized by other scholars as will be later discussed in this section.

The concept of a GLL was first brought to attention and suggested by Joan Rubin in 1975, and, very soon, many other researchers continued to investigate features and understanding of a GLL (e.g., Cohen, 1977; Naiman et al., 1978; Stern, 1975). Based on Rubin's (1975) observations of the language learning process of GLLs in the English-speaking classrooms in California and Hawaii, she proposed a seven-strategy list that could be applied to all good second language (L2) learners. According to that list, a GLL:

- is a willing and accurate guesser;
- has a strong drive to communicate, to learn from communication;
- is not afraid to make mistakes in order to learn and to communicate;
- is constantly looking for patterns in the language;
- seeks opportunities to practice the language;
- always monitors their and others' speech;
- pays attention to the context of the speech act. (p. 45).

Later, in her work, Griffiths (2015) simplified the suggested GLL features list proposed by Stern in 1975, which identified 10 main GLL features, and suggested that a GLL is always:

- experimenting;
- planning;
- developing a new language into an ordered system;
- revising progressively;
- searching for meaning;
- seeking practice;
- using a language in real communication;
- self-monitoring;

- learning to think in a target language. (p. 425).

The above-mentioned strategies were developed as a result of Stern's (1975) observations, teaching and learning experience, and based on the related literature on GLL (i.e., comparisons with Rubin, 1975). In addition, he referred to these items as positive LLSs that characterize a GLL. However, according to Griffiths (2015), although Stern's (1975), similar to Rubin (1975), work contributed to the field of LLSs, there was no clear distinction between "strategy" and "learning style", so it was challenging to define the construct of LLSs. Consequently, it can be suggested that there might be truth to Griffiths' (2018) argument that a lack of agreement among these "three important early studies" (i.e., the works of Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; and Naiman et al., 1996) raises concerns and confusion about the nature of GLLs and LLSs (p. 45). Moreover, it is important to note how the initial studies on GLL were pedagogically oriented as it was suggested that the LLSs employed by more successful learners could be taught to their less successful peers (Rubin, 1975). Finally, Chamot (2001) summarized all the existing information on GLL research at that time by listing the following features of a GLL as of someone who:

- is mentally active;
- monitors language comprehension and production;
- practises communicating in the target language;
- makes use of prior general linguistic knowledge;
- uses different memorization techniques;
- asks questions for clarification. (p. 29).

Ultimately, all these early characteristics of a typical GLL made by particular scholars were not considered in the social contexts, as well as those researchers did not take into account how discouraging it might have been for the students who were not considered GLLs due to various reasons. That is, as every person is unique, everyone requires and possesses an



individual approach to learning materials, obtaining information. In a qualitative study with 15 Italian students who were considered less successful learners of English, Porte (1988) found that these students seemed to deploy almost similar LLSs as the GLLs tended to use (i.e., using additional materials, seeking opportunities to practice English). Consequently, most of those learners, despite their efforts, were failing to succeed due to their insufficient knowledge on the most appropriate utilization of particular LLSs (Hajar, 2015).

Later, in 2012, Palfreyman criticized the cognitive approach in the existing literature and research on a concept of GLL as it, once again, did not regard and consider various contextual realities, social factors or “human agency” (e.g., the influence of family members and friends, personal interest, availability of resources) as something valuable and necessary for acquiring a language. As the main focus in the first works on LLSs and GLLs was primarily on the cognitive (direct) strategies, simultaneously, some researchers started to become more interested in exploring such LLSs as metacognitive strategic efforts that suppose self-organization, self-evaluation and managing one’s learning process (Griffiths, 2015). As there exists an insufficient amount of studies on GLLs that demonstrate the challenges faced by learners in different contexts (e.g., Gao, 2013; Norton & Toohey, 2001), more research on changing perspectives of a GLL is needed, including a sociocultural viewpoint. Finally, as the present study adopts a sociocultural perspective, more detailed information will be discussed in the upcoming sections.

### **Definitional Issues in the Construct of “Language Learning Strategy” (LLS)**

As mentioned before, more than four decades have passed since the LLS concept was first brought to wide attention and developed by Joan Rubin (1975). Researchers that investigated LLSs encountered difficulties connected with the conceptual nature of LLSs, and it encouraged some proponents of LLS research (e.g., Oxford, 2011; Rose, Briggs, Boggs,

Sergio, & Ivanova-Slavianskaia, 2017) to conduct a systematic review of previous LLS research.

Throughout many years of research and investigation on LLSs there have emerged numerous definitions of LLSs that suggest various interpretations. The main idea of the existing definitions retains more or less the same meaning. For instance, Cohen (1997) formulates the definition of “strategy use” as specific efforts made by learners in order to succeed in language learning. Hence, it could be suggested that strategy use is connected with learners’ exercise of agency because it exposes their “self-consciousness, reflexivity, intentionality, cognition, and emotionality” (Carter & New, 2004, p. 6). In this sense, students’ learning agency includes their ability to manage their learning by identifying which activities help them the most and, thus, may lead them to success by achieving their goals (Hajar, 2017). Similarly, Wenden (1987) defines LLSs as particular activities that language learners do and focus on in order to organize their learning process. In return, O’Malley and Chamot (1990) consider language strategic efforts as specific attitudes and thoughts each learner utilizes for their better understanding, information processing, and, as a result, better learning. In other words, according to these definitions, LLSs can be defined as specific techniques that are very individualistic, as well as they vary greatly depending on learners’ experience, preferences, and abilities when it comes to obtaining and learning new information.

Likewise, Oxford (1993) defines LLSs as “specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students employ often consciously to improve their progress in internalizing, storing, retrieving and using the L2” (p. 175). In return, Cohen (1997) further elaborates on the existing definitions by adding that LLSs can indeed be regarded as the kinds of learning processes that are used by learners “consciously” (p. 4). In other words, when defining LLSs,

it is usually highlighted how they certainly refer to a conscious diligence aimed at contributing to and enhancing one's language knowledge, skills, and proficiency.

Furthermore, in her review of autonomy theories, Oxford (2003) places LLSs into two main domains: behavioral (observable steps) and cognitive (unobservable) processes, and defines strategies as concrete plans or steps – either observable (e.g., seeking ways to practice the language) or unobservable (e.g., mentally analyzing new words or information).

In addition, LLSs are often presented as “psychological features that can change through practice and strategy instruction” (Oxford, 2003, p. 77), and in accordance with this, Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) pose questions on whether LLSs, due to being very individual and specific (i.e., “individual differences construct”), could be regarded and defined as “neurological, cognitive, or behavioral processes” (p. 611).

### **Research Methods in LLS Research**

Most previous LLS research was conducted quantitatively and relied mainly on Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL), which “has been the most widely used instrument for assessing language learning strategy use” (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, p. 157). The SILL represents a self-reporting questionnaire that aims to evaluate learners' reported frequency of LLSs use, and not “a specific portrayal of the strategies used by the learner on a particular language task” (Oxford, 1999, p. 114). Due to its popularity and reliability, it is considered to be very well-structured. Moreover, SILL has two variations: one for learners of the English language as a second or foreign language, which contains 50 items, and one for English native speakers learning other languages with 80 items included; and it has five Likert-scale answers for every strategy item, ranging from “never or almost never true of me” to “always or almost true of me” (Oxford, 1999, p. 114). In addition, some of the strategy items are quite general (e.g., “I look for patterns in the new language”) whereas some are more specific (e.g., “I try to notice my language errors and find out the

reasons for them”). According to Oxford (2011), it was reported that about 10,000 learners around the world have used SILL, as well as it was translated into many foreign languages, including such languages as Chinese, German, Arabic, Korean, Japanese, and Portuguese (p. 160).

In addition, as most LLS research entails a kind of a learners’ self-report, there were other research approaches used by LLS researchers (e.g., observation method) (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). Thus, the most well-known data collection methods adopted by LLS researchers also include such approaches as follows survey tools or written questionnaires (e.g., Oxford, 2003); interviews (e.g., O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Gao, 2003); think-aloud protocols or verbal reports (e.g., Nassaji, 2003); diaries or dialogue journals (e.g., Carson & Longhini, 2002); recollective narratives (e.g., Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995); observation (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). In other words, SILL was widely used among LLS researchers (e.g., Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995) initially in North America in relation to foreign language learners, then increasingly by researchers who work in the Asia-Pacific region (e.g., Griffiths, 2003). It can be suggested that SILL has displayed adaptability for contextualized LLS research. For example, Lan and Oxford (2003) accommodated a children’s version of SILL in order to investigate young learners’ strategy use in Taiwan; and studies like this provided a broader picture of the strategy use of thousands of learners across cultures and have identified many factors that might have an impact on learners’ strategy use (i.e., learning styles, proficiency, learner beliefs, and gender).

### **A Summary of the Major Criticisms of LLS Research**

The amount of discussions and literature presented above seems to confirm the fact that a cognitive perspective dominates LLS research, as well as many empirical studies on LLS research have utilized survey methods to investigate LLSs and their nature. At this point, it might be essential to provide a general picture of the “social turn” in LLS research

that departs from the dominance of cognitive norms and assumptions (Hajar, 2017). In other words, with the “social turn” in education (Block, 2003), the prevalence of cognitive approaches to language learning and LLSs was criticized as it was argued that language learning depends on many other factors besides a learner’s individual characteristics. As stated by Gao (2010), “language learning takes place not just in individual learners’ minds but also in society” (p. 18). As a result, the “social turn” in LLS research has played a key role in encouraging LLS researchers to explore students’ LLSs from a sociocultural viewpoint, as will be discussed in more detail in the upcoming sections.

As mentioned before, the majority of LLS research in the past utilized questionnaires; particularly Oxford’s (1990) SILL and theoretical framework in both English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) settings (Rose, Briggs, Boggs, Sergio, & Ivanova-Slavianskaia, 2018). That is, most previous research was conducted quantitatively which did not quite allow to explore and understand a deeper nature of language learners’ LLS uses and reasons for such choices. As a result, such quantitative approaches for LLS research have been criticized by various researchers (e.g., Gao, 2004; Wray & Hajar, 2013).

The three major criticisms made by these researchers were summarized in Hajar’s 2019 work, where, firstly, it was stated that strategy surveys and questionnaires usually do not take into account the impact of “contextual variations on language learners’ strategy use” (p. 22). That is, once again, when using questionnaires, there is no attention given to the influence of social factors, availability of learning resources, possibilities, and any other issues that might contribute to and enable successful language learning or, on the contrary, prevent from succeeding. Another issue deals with the fact that language learners might experience difficulties with understanding correctly the strategy interpretations and descriptions in questionnaires. For example, some items in Oxford’s (1990) SILL may be

unclear to some English learners where English is taught as a foreign language in their home countries. It could also be that learners might become confused when answering the following item in Oxford's (1990) SILL: "I pay attention when someone is speaking English", it might be difficult to define who "someone" is (Hajar, 2019). Simultaneously, as a result of her study, Griffiths (2013) notes that some of the major strategies mentioned by her participants during the interviews were not included in SILL (e.g., "looking new words up in a dictionary", "reading newspapers", and "keeping a notebook", p. 47). Once again, the effectiveness of general strategy questionnaires used to measure learners' strategy use might be unreliable merely because the survey tools "do not appear to apply equally well to all learners irrespective of different educational and social backgrounds" (Hajar, 2018, p. 23). In response to criticism, Oxford (2011) recommends LLS researchers to accommodate questionnaire items and components for their local or contextual settings, as well as they could offer their participants to feel free to add any other strategies that are not mentioned in the survey.

Furthermore, another criticism addresses the issue of uncertainty whether strategy surveys can truly evaluate what they are intended to (Gao, 2004). In other words, when filling in the survey, learners might score highly on certain items in the memory scale, but at the same time they are not good at memory strategy utilization. This way, such language learning strategy questionnaires might also regard language learners' strategy use simply as a static variable due to concentrating on the frequency of strategy uses (Hajar, 2019).

### **A Sociocultural Perspective in LLS Research Adopted in this Study**

As mentioned above, with the "social turn" in LLS research and education it was argued whether a previously adopted cognitive perspective in LLS research could not be regarded as the most effective one. As a result, many more researchers started to consider sociocultural language learning perspectives, which emphasize the role of agency in learners'

strategy use through its theorization of activity, where agency underlies learners' dynamic strategic behaviors as they always "transform their strategy use to pursue their goals in response to contextual changes" (Gao, 2010, p. 21).

In their critique of GLL research and study on the changing perspectives of a "good language learner" (GLL), Norton and Toohey (2001) explored the language learning experiences of Eva and Julie, two Polish immigrants residing in Canada. Both of them were exposed to English in a setting in which English was the major means of communication and had particular approaches to English language learning including such strategies as "monitoring their performance more diligently and exploiting the target language more systematically" (p. 318). Both of them were identified as being GLLs, and the authors concluded that the presence of social factors in their lives impacted their linguistic success. That is, Eva who worked at a fast food chain, was able to communicate with her colleagues during social outings, and Julie practiced English with her kindergarten teacher and friends. In addition, one of the predictors of success was their ability to engage with co-workers and peers through knowledge about Italian, Polish and European backgrounds that attracted their communicators (i.e., human agency). Thus, they exercised their own agency by using effective strategies to achieve their goals.

Similarly, in a study by Gao (2006) on understanding changes in Chinese students' uses of LLSs in China and Britain, he also adopted a sociocultural perspective. In other words, he investigated 14 Chinese learners' uses of LLSs after they moved from China to Britain. In his paper, by interviewing the participants (almost all in Chinese), he tried to demonstrate the influences of mediating agents (i.e., teachers, family members, and peers), assessment approaches, and other factors on their English LLS in China. Then, after the participants moved to Britain for their studies, there were evident changes in their LLS

adaptations. That is, the assessment methods were different from China, and influential mediating agents were replaced by English-speakers who encouraged their language learning. As a result, with the adaptation of the sociocultural viewpoint, it was possible to explore and gain a better understanding of the students' shifting strategy use after moving to a different setting.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, there were three major directions of LLS research, with the first direction exploring GLLs where the focus was on a universal set of features of GLLs which can then be taught to less successful learners (Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Naiman et al., 1978). The second direction refers to a gradual shift on the metacognitive strategies (see Chapters 4 & 5), that learners deploy in order to manage and organize their own language learning (Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Finally, the latest third direction of LLS research that is being adopted and looked at as a conceptual framework in this study, suggests taking into account not only internal but external or social factors that might also have an influence on strategy use (i.e., gender, motivation, age, mediating agents, and learning style).

LLS researchers (Hajar, 2019; Gao, 2006; Norton & Toohey, 2001) suggest using a sociocultural approach in order to provide “insights into the influences of learning environment on strategy use over time” (Gao, 2006, p. 7). As mentioned in a study above, with the help of a sociocultural perspective approach, proficiencies of GLLs “were bound up not only with what they did individually but also in the possibilities their various communities offered them” (Norton & Toohey, 2001, p. 318).



### Chapter 3: Methodology

The previous chapter focused on reviewing the literature relevant to the field of language learning strategies (LLSs) and justifying the sociocultural perspective on LLS research utilized in the present research. That is, this study is the first empirical study in Kazakhstan that espouses a sociocultural framework in order to attain a rich and contextualized picture of a group of Kazakhstani masters students' language learning experiences, underlying their strategy uses and learning goals while studying at an elite English-medium university in Kazakhstan. In this sense, the following research questions, presented at the end of Chapter 1, need to be answered:

1. What are the particular patterns of learning strategies used by the participants?
2. What influenced the participants' choices and use of strategies?

For that purpose, the information on the research design is given first, which is followed by a description and a justification of the data collection instruments, research site and the sampling procedures. This research uses two qualitative research methods; namely, a written narrative and semi-structured interviews, so that rich data can be attained to achieve a holistic portrait of the participants' strategic learning efforts. Then, the data collection procedures are thoroughly discussed. Afterwards, the steps taken in the data analysis are described. The last part of this chapter discusses the ethical issues related to the study.

#### Research Design

As previously explained, over-dependence on task-free strategy questionnaires, which address language learners' strategy preferences independently of the situation or task at hand, can create the impression that language learners' strategy use is a static variable by focusing on the frequency of learners' strategy use, rather than on their situated and actual use and development of LLSs (see Gao, 2004; Takeuchi, 2019). With the aim of understanding the participants' actual uses of LLSs together with the different factors that are likely to affect

their choice and use of certain LLSs and learning goals in a specific context, two qualitative methods were employed in the present study; namely, narrative writing and semi-structured individual interviews.

Firstly, a narrative writing was used in the current research to help me to construct the consequent interview questions, together with enhancing the validity of the study results and obtaining some background information of the research participants. Afterwards, the one-on-one semi-structured interviews were used in order to gain a deeper and situated understanding of the participants' language learning experiences, underlying their own strategy uses and future vision while attending their master's program at one of the elite universities in Kazakhstan.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

For this study two data collection instruments were used: narrative writing and semi-structured individual interviews. That is, with the help of narrative writing the interview questions were prepared and constructed individually beforehand.

#### **Narrative Writing.**

The merit of using a narrative writing is to help researchers attain insights into their participants' 'private worlds, inaccessible to experimental methodologies, and thus provide the insider's view of the processes of language learning, attrition, and use' (Pavlenko, 2007, p. 164). Moreover, asking the participants to write short essays prior to the interviews allowed the researcher of the present study to construct appropriate interview questions with each participant.

In other words, the researcher sent out an email to the students who agreed to participate in the study asking them to write a short account in the language (English or Russian) they prefer about themselves and some of their English learning experiences and the LLSs that they often employ after joining the target program. As a result, seven participants

wrote their essays in English and four other participants wrote in Russian. In addition, the participants were given a set of questions to help them frame their essay. Here is a set of questions that students needed to address in their own essay adapted based on Hajar's work (2020):

*1. Could you please write general information about your background (e.g., your parents' job, how many brothers and sisters you have, your city/village, your previous education).*

*2. When and how did you start learning English?*

*3. What was your perspective on learning English at that time?*

*4. When did you recognize the importance of English in your life?*

*5. What sort of problems did you usually have in learning English?*

*6. How did you usually sort those problems out?*

*7. What kind of challenges with Academic English are you now facing? How do you deal with them?*

### **Semi-Structured Individual Interviews.**

Being the most commonly used interview type, the semi-structured interview allows researchers to effectively balance the dual focus on their research goals by structuring the interviews and giving participants enough freedom to add extra information that can be of value (Brinkmann, 2013). In other words, a semi-structured interview is a qualitative research tool that comprises a pre-determined set of open-ended questions to initiate discussions and provide both the researcher and respondent with the opportunity to further explore specific themes or responses (Adams, 2015). That is, even though the questions are prepared in advance, the conversation becomes more meaningful because of the natural flow that is encouraged. Moreover, individual interviews are more suitable when sensitive issues might

be discussed so that the respondent does not restrain from giving genuine responses, as well as some people are simply not comfortable around strangers (Brinkmann, 2013).

As mentioned before, the essays were first obtained from the participants. Then, after reviewing the essays, on another appointed day, the one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, which include the strategies they deploy to overcome the diverse difficulties they confront while studying through the medium of English. In addition, the interviews were carried out only once for more authentic data to be obtained (i.e., so that the participants did not have to repeat and reconsider their thoughts), and they lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. As a result, all of the participants preferred to answer in Russian mixing their speech with words, phrases and sentences in Kazakh or English.

### **Research Site**

The study was conducted at an EMI university in the capital of Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan (previously Astana), which lies in the north-central part of the country along the Ishim River. The university was founded as a result of the initiative of the first President of Kazakhstan in 2010 and is an English-medium institution, with an international faculty and staff (Wikipedia, n.d.). Moreover, being an autonomous university, it is a modern and rapidly growing one, with the vision of training professionals whose qualifications meet the highest international standards to contribute to the research, education, and the national economy. It is worth mentioning that students who intend to join this university need to have a particular level of English depending on a program (i.e., IELTS 6.5 and higher), evaluated through an international examination (i.e., IELTS or TOEFL). In this way, the choice of this site is justified by the fact that students whose level of English is high enough to study in English can shed more light regarding the study purpose. The data collection process took place in a booked-in-advance team room in one of the study blocks of that university. In other words,

each face-to-face meeting was scheduled beforehand at participant's convenience and conducted in a comfortable, quiet setting.

### **Sampling**

For this study, purposeful sampling was applied so that the participants were selected and chosen by the researcher in order to understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Full-time first year master's students from one social science program were recruited because of convenience and the availability of gatekeepers. Moreover, usually, first year master's students are not very occupied with studies thus are more approachable; and most of the full-time graduate students reside on campus hence they were more approachable to the researcher of this study. Notably, the participants for this study were recruited by approaching a course professor of that particular master's program followed by approaching the students. More precisely, due to the limited time given for the data collection and research in general, the researcher asked the professor of one master's program help her with the recruitment, spread the information about the study and recommend the best way of approaching the target participants of the study under investigation.

The total number of participants in a qualitative study is "often small" since a big number is "neither practical nor beneficial" (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011, p. 88). Moreover, the number of participants to recruit was guided by a theoretical principle known as *saturation* which supposes collecting information until it starts to repeat itself (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In other words, the number of participants was guided by the "diversity in the information gained" (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011, p. 88). Consequently, since the chosen program students comprise 15 people, only 11 students decided to participate due to their interest in the study and availability.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

After obtaining the permission from the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education (NUGSE) Ethics Committee to conduct the study, the possible participants were approached by the researcher through one of the professors at the program. On the first meeting with the participants during their break between classes the researcher described the study and its purpose along with the possible benefits to participating. Then, the researcher contacted the students who signed up for the participation via e-mail using the @nu.edu.kz mail address in order to further explain the intentions, purposes, benefits and risks of the study together with the participants' rights. The researcher ascertained that the confidentiality of the research site was assured by not mentioning the location of the higher education institution and the name of the graduate program. That is, the researcher sent the participants an email including the consent form and the essay questions (in English and Russian). After the researcher received the essays, she set up a one-on-one interview with each of the participants on a day and timing that was the most suitable for each of them.

Before the interview, the researcher concentrated on a brief explanation of the study once again and reminded the participants that their involvement was optional, and they could withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. The duration of each interview lasted between thirty minutes to an hour which allowed to answer the major research questions. The researcher interviewed the participants only once for more authentic and genuine responses as was mentioned before, and each interview was recorded via the researcher's smartphone and laptop. The participants' verbal permission to digitally record their speech for later transcription was also obtained and recalled at the start of the interview.

As for the language during the interviews – based on participants' preference, Russian only was used despite the option to respond in Kazakh or English as well. However, a lot of code-switching took place during the interviews with the participants alternating between

Kazakh-Russian-English phrases and words. Furthermore, according to Roberts and Priest (2010), “researchers must undertake to keep all information confidential and secure, and to inform participants where and how it will be stored, who will have access to it and how it will be used” (p. 116). As a result, once again, the participants were explicitly told that their names, program and university name would be anonymous, and that the data collected would be stored in a safe, secure place accessed only by the researcher and her supervisor.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Once the data were collected, the audio-recorded interviews of the eleven participants were meticulously transcribed verbatim by the researcher with the help of a website called [otranscribe.com](http://otranscribe.com). Then, both the essays and semi-structured interview transcripts (see Appendix C) were analyzed thoroughly using the six phases of thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2013). In this sense, thematic analysis is “a method for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) across qualitative data” in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 218). In other words, as adapted from Howitt and Cramer (2011) on Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2013) six phases of thematic analysis, the following steps include:

1. Familiarization with data;
2. Initial coding generation;
3. Search for themes based on the initial coding;
4. Report writing;
5. Themes identification labelling;
6. Review of the themes. (p. 336).

In order to familiarize myself with the data, the interview transcripts were read and re-read “actively, analytically, and critically” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 205), and open codes were formed after several careful examinations of the essays and interview transcripts. The open codes were then generated and grouped into the themes that occur in both the essays and

interviews (see Table 1, Chapter 4). For instance, in their interviews, two participants mentioned how during their school education, they had to translate texts from English to Kazakh or Russian as part of their English lessons, hence this fell into the category of a compulsory strategy item as “translating texts from English to Kazakh or Russian”; or, several participants were describing in their essays and interviews how useful for them watching content in English was during their school and higher education, hence this was labeled as “watching English YouTube videos” and “watching TV shows, cartoons and films in English” (see Table 1, Chapter 4).

According to the research questions, the codes were used to decipher the language learning experiences and LLSs utilization by 11 graduate students in an EMI program. As a result, five major themes with subthemes were developed to respond to the research questions (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, the researcher discussed the suggested themes with her supervisor before coming to an agreement to the final themes in order to enhance the reliability of the findings of this study. The themes and extracts of each stage of the data analysis will be explained in Chapters 4 and 5, where the extracts for each finding illustrate the participants’ LLS choices and use.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Conducting a research study, as Creswell (2014) suggests, requires following certain ethical considerations in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, as well as provide them with the information regarding any potential risks. With this in mind, at the beginning of each interview, the researcher explained the purpose, benefits and risks of the study. Moreover, the researcher highlighted that the names of all interviewees would be replaced by pseudonyms which protects them from being identified. The obtained data were kept on a computer belonging to the researcher in folders secured by a password.



Additionally, the data of the interview recordings were saved on the researcher's personal USB flash drive and kept in a special secured box. All these measures were carried out to guarantee that only the researcher has access to these files. Notably, any possible risks associated with this study were very minimal due to participants' personal identity being kept confidential. In other words, to reduce any potential risks of the study related to participants, the name of institution is not mentioned, the names of the target institution and participants were kept anonymous. All personal data and interviews were stored in a secured place. Apart from the researcher's supervisor, no information from the essays and interviews was shared with their university instructors or university staff. In addition, the interview questions did not cause any psychological discomfort or harm to the participants. In order to build a positive relationship of trust with the participants, the researcher provided as much verified information about herself, using shared language (i.e., Kazakh or Russian).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter provided the description of the study's methodology by presenting in detail and justifying the research design and site, sampling procedures, data collection instrument, data collection procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations. In particular, the study implemented a qualitative approach using a written narrative and individual semi-structured interviews. Eleven participants from one graduate EMI program were involved in the study. To ensure protection of the participants' rights and other ethical considerations, an ethics approval was received from the NUGSE Research Committee in November 2019, as well as it was explained to the participants. The next chapter will present the main findings of the study.

## Chapter 4: Findings

The previous chapter described the selection of the participants and the setting. It also dealt with the methods deployed to gather the data for the research. This research used two main research methods, namely, narrative writing and semi-structured interviews, so that the rich data could be obtained to achieve a holistic portrait of the participants' strategic learning efforts. In Chapter 3, the process of analyzing the qualitative data of this study using Braun' and Clarke's (2006, 2013) systematic guideline for conducting the thematic analysis in this research was explained. The last part of the previous chapter discussed the ethical issues related to the study. The current chapter reports on the findings obtained from 11 participants to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the particular patterns of learning strategies used by the participants?
2. What influenced the participants' choices and use of strategies?

This chapter will begin with a synopsis of each participant's biography based on the data from their essays. Following this biographical account, a table with the counted strategies found in the interview data will be presented. Then, the core themes and subthemes that influenced the participants' strategic learning efforts will be explained in a concise, coherent, logical, and interesting way. The emergent five themes are: "past language learning experiences", "the influence of mediating social agents", "the mediating role of objects", "academic and linguistic challenges encountered during the EMI program", and "learning goals and motivation".

### **Biographical Vignettes of the Research Participants**

This section presents vignettes of each participant's biographies, based on their short-written accounts of the past English learning experiences. As already described in Chapter 3, the present study involved 11 participants.

**Aliya**

Aliya was born in a middle-class family in the western part of Kazakhstan, where she also went to a secondary school. There are four people in her family: Aliya, her parents and her elder sister. Aliya's English language learning began in Grade 5 when she was 10 years old. However, according to her, the knowledge her school provided was not sufficient enough. Aliya became aware of the importance of English in her life during her first undergraduate years. Later on, after graduating and gaining some work experience she decided to pursue graduate studies. She thus needed to demonstrate adequate English proficiency by obtaining a high score in either the IELTS or TOEFL exam. Aliya took the IELTS exam to achieve the required score.

**Indira**

Indira was born and raised in a village with her parents who work in the sphere of education: her mother is a primary school teacher and her father is a vice-principal. There are three children in her family: Indira, her little brother and sister. Indira has two undergraduate degrees. She started learning English in Grade 5 but, as she described, her lessons were "useless". She realized the importance of English when she herself started to work in a school and was feeling uncomfortable because of lack of English knowledge and competency. Then, she switched her jobs and worked as an office worker until she met a professor of the current program she was enrolled in. She was encouraged to finally enhance her linguistic skills and join the program. Indira underwent a year-long foundation language program before starting her master's studies, and that preparation year helped her to improve her English language skills a lot.

**Anara**

Anara comes from a lower middle-class family; her father works as an engineer at a local telecommunication company and her mother is a housewife. She has a younger sister

who is currently in her third year of undergraduate studies. Anara attended a regular school until Grade 7 and then transferred to an elite EMI school on a scholarship. As a child, Anara was always interested in foreign languages and gaining knowledge in general. She reported that her English skills were poor before joining the EMI school where she had the experience of communicating with international teachers and staff in English. The importance of English to Anara was outlined in the massive interest she expressed. She would always borrow books in English from her school library and interact with her international teachers. In addition, Anara shared how she had always been interested in different cultures (primarily, English speaking). For her, English represents a tool to discover various cultures through music, YouTube videos, and movies. However, the greatest advantage, as she described, was that she often found her favorite Japanese anime TV shows in English rather than in Russian.

### **Zhuldyz**

Zhuldyz was born in a city in south-central Kazakhstan. She has an elder sister and two little brothers. Her father and elder sister are architects and her mother is a school teacher. She has a younger brother and a younger sister. She began to learn English when she was in Grade 5. However, she stated that her school knowledge was insufficient. Later on, when she enrolled in an EMI university in Almaty, she started to learn and practice English, as well as this was the period of time when she realized the importance of English.

### **Saule**

Saule was born in a small town in the western part of Kazakhstan. She is the only child, her father is an oil-factory worker and her mother is a housewife. She was formally introduced to English as a subject in Grade 2. However, due to poor knowledge given in school, as she claimed, she had to attend a private language school, which was her mother's idea "for future employment". She gradually realized the importance of the language as well.

Moreover, initial thoughts about doing a BA in English first came to her when she went to England for a summer break as she returned very motivated to speak the language fluently.

### **Damir**

Damir was born in 1994 in Nur-Sultan (previously Astana). He is the eldest child with a younger sister and a younger brother. Damir's father deals with construction work and his mother by profession is a pianist. He started learning English in kindergarten and then in primary school. He did not attend any language courses besides his IELTS preparation course. Right after high school Damir obtained a college degree in Finance, and later went to study journalism in Poland but returned after six months. Coming back to Nur-Sultan (previously Astana), he enrolled in an online bachelor's degree program in social work and started working as an English-Russian translator and then, as an administrative assistant to an American director of an American private school in Nur-Sultan (previously Astana). According to Damir, he always considered English important, however, he was still struggling with it even when working in an American private school. However, he had learned a lot there and managed to improve his linguistic skills with time before joining this master's program.

### **Olzhas**

Olzhas was born in the "oil capital of Kazakhstan", in Atyrau, in 1996. His father is an engineer at a thermal power plant, mother has a small business in the field of trade and marketing, and his little sister is in middle school. He began to learn English when he was a child of around 10 years old as his mother "persuaded" him to quit karate sessions and attend English courses instead. Later, he started to realize the importance of English when his teachers and friends were showing "positive attitudes" and he was becoming more involved in the process of learning English.

**Anel**

Anel was born in 1997 in a city called Kokshetau, however she moved to Nur-Sultan (previously Astana) when she was 13. During that time, her mother worked in the Ministry of Ecology and Geology both as a specialist and a translator, and her father worked in the financial police. In school, she began to learn English in Grade 2, but she had already been introduced to the language in the kindergarten. Anel shared that her teachers in school were qualified enough not to “decrease” their motivation as the lessons were interesting. During the eleven years of her school education, she did not face noticeable problems with the English language and studied it only at school.

**Moldir**

Moldir was born in 1997 in a historical city called Semey. Moldir’s mother is a history teacher, father is a chief technical officer in a local drilling and blasting company. She has two elder sisters. During her undergraduate studies, she participated in a dual degree program so that she had the opportunity to graduate from both a local university in Semey and a university in South Korea majoring in two foreign languages education. She realized the importance of English when she had to prepare for the final tests upon her high school graduation as well as during the time when she decided for herself that she wanted to study abroad.

**Sanzhar**

Sanzhar was born and raised in a small village in the south of Kazakhstan; his father has been working as a railwayman for his whole life and mother is both a hairdresser and a dressmaker. Sanzhar has two sisters. He started learning English at school in Grade 5 and it was his favorite subject. However, due to having an inexperienced English teacher and due to insufficient knowledge provided, Sanzhar had to learn it on his own at home. In addition, as he was not “lucky enough” to go to university right after finishing high school; he had to

work for two years before enrolling in a university. Therefore, according to Sanzhar, he recognized the importance of English when he made the decision to leave his job.

### **Aigerim**

Aigerim is from a village in the southern part of Kazakhstan. There are six people in her family, where her parents are both public school teachers (mother is a biology teacher and father is a history teacher); she also has a brother and two elder sisters. Aigerim started to learn English in Grade 5 as well as most of the other participants. In addition, according to her, she had “a very low proficiency” in English even after finishing her bachelor’s degree majoring in the English language education. She ascribed this matter largely to her “unskilled teachers” and her “poor language learning motivation”. Aigerim started to realize the importance of English when she was working at a private language school in Nur-Sultan (previously Astana) as she understood that English “may bring great opportunities and expand her knowledge and way of thinking”.

### **Strategies Used by the Participants**

This section presents a table of counted learning strategies used by the participants with the aim of offering a general picture of what might have been deployed by the participants to enhance their English language skills. Moreover, as previously explained in Chapter 2, this study adapted both Griffiths and Oxford’s (2014, p. 2) and Hajar’s (2015) approaches to strategy classification, “by reporting the patterns of strategy use displayed in the data according to the participants’ experiential accounts and their language learning goals rather than any pre-existing classification system” (Hajar, 2015, p. 163). Two key points were taken into consideration while counting the participants’ strategy use in the interview data (see Table 1) where the first was that when a particular participant made several references to the same strategy in the interview, only one count was taken. The second indicated the language learning experiences that were divided into two phases: the first covering the school

level of their education and during their preparation for IELTS, and the second starting after going to university (Hajar, 2015).

Table 1

*Strategies Used by the Participants (Phase 1: School Education; Phase 2: University or Additional Education)*

Strategy classification according to the findings of this study	Strategy items	Participants	
		Phase 1	Phase 2
Compulsory strategies (e.g., exam-taking necessities with direct involvement/coercion from social agents)	Memorizing assignments and vocabulary	Indira	Indira, Zhuldyz, Olzhas, Sanzhar and Aigerim
	Translating and writing down new vocabulary	Aliya, Anara and Anel	Moldir
	Translating texts from English to Kazakh or Russian	Anel and Aigerim	
	Being active during lessons (i.e., asking questions for clarification)	Aliya	
	Writing out grammar rules and tips, re-reading them	Saule	
	Attending language courses or working with a private tutor	Indira, Anara, Saule, Olzhas, Anel, Moldir and Sanzhar	Zhuldyz and Aigerim
	Working on test/exam sample materials (e.g., IELTS, United National Testing)	Aliya, Anel, Moldir and Sanzhar	Indira
	Listening to cassettes (e.g., dialogues between native English speakers)	Damir	
	Using international English textbooks	Anara, Saule and Damir	



	Attending consultations with teachers (i.e., office hours)	Aliya	Olzhas
Voluntary strategies (little external coercion but more external encouragement)	Participating in English clubs with native speakers		Aliya and Aigerim
	Listening to English songs to relax or to learn new phrases/words	Aliya, Zhuldyz and Anara	Aliya, Zhuldyz, Anara, Olzhas and Anel
	Listening to English learning podcasts		Aigerim
	Translating English lyrics	Aliya	Olzhas
	Watching YouTube videos in English (e.g., for entertainment, tutorials, vlogs)	Anara and Moldir	Anara, Moldir and Sanzhar
	Watching YouTube English lesson videos (e.g., IELTS, General English)	Saule and Anel	Indira
	Watching TV shows, cartoons and films in English	Anara, Damir and Anel	Indira, Anara, Damir, Anel
	Watching anime (a style of Japanese film and TV animation) in English with English subtitles	Anara	
	Watching interviews in English (e.g., with celebrities)		Anara and Sanzhar
	Communicating with foreigners (native speakers)	Anara and Moldir	Aliya, Damir and Moldir
	Seeking opportunities to practice English outside the classroom	Anara	Aliya
	Using online chat rooms to practice English		Sanzhar
	Composing mind maps and outlines with bullet points for oral presentations		Zhuldyz, Saule, Olzhas, Sanzhar
	Composing mind maps and outlines for written assignments		Zhuldyz, Olzhas, Sanzhar

	Writing down new vocabulary (with English definitions or translations) and re-reading it		Zhuldyz and Damir
	Using the Internet resources (e.g., Google Translate, “Grammarly”, online learning platforms)		Indira, Zhuldyz, Saule, Damir, Olzhas and Sanzhar
	Self-motivating (i.e., “affective strategies” – encouraging yourself)	Saule	Aliya, Damir, Olzhas and Moldir
	Seeking help from more proficient peers		Aliya and Zhuldyz
	Reading books and extracurricular materials in English		Indira, Anara, Saule, Olzhas and Moldir
	Re-reading academic articles several times		Sanzhar

As presented in the table above, the participants’ strategy use was classified into two main categories: “compulsory strategies” and “voluntary strategies” (Hajar, 2019). The compulsory strategies are the ones that were used under the regulation of teachers or parents, and were associated with formal education (e.g., grade-getting); whereas the voluntary represented the strategies used due to learners’ personal interest or self-motivation in regard to improving English (Hajar, 2015). The following two extracts taken from Anara’s interview transcripts demonstrate the difference between compulsory and voluntary strategies:

When we started learning English in Grade 5, we were just writing down new words in a copybook with their translations which resulted in very basic knowledge of English.

Since I have always loved music, even back then, I would listen to my favorite songs in English and look up the lyrics on the Internet, learn new words. It has been my personal interest.

In other words, in the first extract, Anara found the approach to learning new words in school useless, and the second extract demonstrates how Anara implemented multimedia LLSs by listening to her favorite music and thus learning new vocabulary in context and developing understanding of the cultures of English-speaking societies. In addition, she mentioned her personal interest hence referring to voluntary strategies.

### **Interpreting the Participants' Strategy Use and Development**

While the previous section has provided a general picture of the participants' pattern of strategy use, this section seeks to give more in-depth information about the factors that led the participants to choose and use certain strategies.

#### **Past Language Learning Experiences.**

One of the emergent themes gained from analyzing the data was related to participants' past language learning experiences which includes two subthemes: school education and tertiary education (e.g., university education, qualification courses). Until recently, the majority of Kazakhstani students were usually exposed to the English language as a subject in Grade 5; however, in urban schools English has generally been taught from Grade 1. That is, English is currently taught as a subject from Grade 1 due to the introduction of the trilingual education policy (Irsaliyev et al., 2017). With this in mind, all the participants were above 21 years old and almost all of them were formally introduced to the English language from Grade 5, apart from Saule, Anel and Damir. In addition, some of the participants went to rural schools where the quality of education was low (e.g., unqualified, inexperienced teaching staff, or lack of learning tools and materials). As a result, the participants revealed the necessity to turn to other means of education or self-study in order to improve their English language skills. Given the above, all participants described their past English language learning experiences in the upcoming sections.

*School Education.*

Out of 11 participants, eight were formally introduced to the English language as a subject in Grade 5, and the other three participants were formally introduced to the English language in Grade 2. Four participants (Aliya, Aigerim, Indira, and Sanzhar), who had attended rural schools, highlighted their English language teachers' lack of qualifications. Commenting on this point, Aliya and Indira stated the following:

## Extract 1:

Our first English teacher in my village was the Kazakh language teacher. She was a young teacher that had recently graduated from university. She was teaching us English the whole academic year. I still remember how we were pronouncing some words differently... The following year, in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, we had a new teacher, also a fresh graduate with an English major...he started fixing our pronunciation...and we would wonder “why, how?”...because we were assured that our previous teacher knew English very well as she was a straight “A” student. But at that time, we were children and did not realize it was wrong that a Kazakh language teacher taught us English. (Aliya, November 20, 2019).

## Extract 2:

I went to a rural school and we had a teacher whose qualification was in the German language teaching, but she was teaching us English. It was very strange, and I realized that only when, later, I started to learn English properly...Maybe I could read in English at that time, but I did not know anything else. Although I was an “A” student, the result was insufficient. Basically, school education did not give me any knowledge of English. (Indira, November 20, 2019).

The above extracts exemplified the issue of how the lack of qualified language teachers in rural schools in Kazakhstan is common due to various factors where one is connected with

the fact that teacher salaries are very low in Kazakhstan. Namely, teachers' average annual salary in the successful multilingual countries is \$48615 while in Kazakhstan it is \$2736 - almost 18 times less (Irsaliyev et al., 2017, p. 160). Related to this, the two other participants who also went to rural schools, reported:

Extract 3:

As you know, teachers in the villages are in general not quite competent or qualified. Moreover, our English teacher was young and lacked teaching experience...But I think it was not her fault – it was the fault of the whole education system. (Sanzhar, November 23, 2019).

Extract 4:

I attended an ordinary village school. In our English lessons we were just sitting and getting zero knowledge. I remember how we were given huge texts for translation from Russian or Kazakh to English, but we did not even know how to say “My name is...” in English. So, we considered English as the most useless subject because of the way it was delivered to us. (Aigerim, November 23, 2019).

Both extracts add up to the previous two extracts by demonstrating how problematic school education in general can be in the rural areas of Kazakhstan due to teachers' lack of experience and low qualifications. Moreover, in addition to Extract 1, Aliya stated how their second English teacher was the only English teacher in the school, and he had to teach all the students, hence a lot of workload was put on him. Similarly, Sanzhar, in Extract 3, expressed the opinion it might not be entirely teachers' fault that the quality of education is low. Furthermore, in Extract 4, Aigerim mentioned that their English teacher used to adopt the traditional way of teaching which was heavily based on repetition, translation and rote memorization strategies. However, such an approach to education is not common to rural

education only, as mentioned in Chapter 4, in her interview, Anara described her English language learning in an urban school as follows:

Extract 5:

When we started learning English in Grade 5, our English teacher did not know much English herself, so we were just writing out new words with their translations, and we had a very basic knowledge of English. So, I would learn grammar on my own with the help of books. (Anara, November 20, 2019).

Extract 5 demonstrates how such a teaching approach led to the learner's metacognitive strategies efforts in terms of planning and arranging her own learning. In addition, when Anara transferred to an elite Nazarbayev Intellectual School (NIS) in Grade 7 on a state scholarship, she shared the following about the language learning experience there:

Extract 6:

I have been interested in the English language since I was a child... So, after I joined NIS, I significantly improved my English language skills. I was communicating with our foreign teaching staff in English. I felt I had a direct connection with them: I would always show them around the city, I became friends with them. Then, by Grade 10, I began to read books and watch movies in English. (Anara, November 20, 2019).

To clarify, NIS are considered to be the elite EMI schools with international teaching staff that have been operating since 2008 and are supported by the government, as well as they "implement the strong model of multilingual education" (Irsaliyev et al., 2017, p. 135). There are currently 20 NIS schools operating throughout the country, and education is free of charge according to a contest-based distribution of scholarships. That said, Anara in Extract 6 explained the effectiveness of the international environment because she recognized the importance of English in her life after joining NIS. This particular environment helped the participant to develop effective strategies such as social strategies by offering her an

opportunity to practice English with foreigners. Moreover, there were also cognitive strategies used when practicing the skills through reading and watching content in English.

To further illustrate these points:

Extract 7:

In NIS, because of the foreign teaching staff it was easier for me to enhance my English skills. And even my accent was more American or British. Basically, EMI facilitated the acquisition process for me as the teachers were very supportive. What also helped was that we studied science subjects in English, so both the input and the output were through English, and it was easier for me that way. (Anara, November 20, 2019).

In addition to the previously mentioned strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, social), in Extract 7, Anara suggests that her NIS teachers' practices mediated the utilization of affective strategies, as stated above, the teachers were encouraging and supportive.

Furthermore, one of the other issues most of the participants highlighted in regard to their language learning experience in school was connected with the Kazakhstani English textbooks. For instance, Zhuldyz, who attended a public school in a city, elaborated on this point:

Extract 8:

In our English lessons we were reading texts that we did not even understand. There was no methodology at all. Our English teachers did not even know English well enough themselves. We also had Kazakhstani English textbooks which were inappropriate since they did not correspond to our level of English at that moment. That is, when we just started learning English in Grade 5, we had to work on serious texts right away; there were no basics such as the English alphabet. (Zhuldyz, November 21, 2019).

In other words, such learning approaches may be related to surface learning where students perceive tasks as enforced work (Marton & Saljö, 1976). As a result, these students tend to act as passive learners and view learning as coping with assignments only to pass assessments. Moreover, according to the existing research on motivation in second language learning there are various demotivating factors including teacher-based factors, such as the attitude of the teacher, their teaching competence, style of teaching, and language proficiency level (as mentioned in Han, Takkaç Tulgar, & Aybirdi, 2019). That is, teachers' teaching methods may impact negatively on students' motivational strategies. In the same way, another finding that emerged from the interview with Aliya referred to the typical "Soviet" approach to the language acquisition:

Extract 9:

Our second English teacher had very good grammar skills. We all could read in English well as we would often do only different translation activities and reading tasks. As for speaking, I can state that up to Grade 11, we never practiced English speaking skills with the help of discussions or something like that. We as children did not know what our necessities were. (Aliya, November 20, 2019).

It can be observed how widespread such a use of translation and rote memorization strategies was, as well as it may be attributed to the lack of English resources in rural schools.

However, despite such past language learning experiences, this study participants managed to develop and implement the strategic efforts (i.e., cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies) that were mentioned above and will be presented in more detail in the upcoming sections.

### ***Tertiary Education.***

Prior to or during the university education period, the vast majority of the study participants had to undergo extra language learning training in order to improve their English



language skills. However, it is also important to emphasize how at that time private language schools were not so widespread, even in the urban areas. For example, Zhuldyz mentioned how there were no such options in her hometown:

Extract 10:

I finished high school in 2012 and we did not have any language schools at that time. No one attended such private schools. We did not even think of them. (Zhuldyz, November 21, 2019).

However, taking into consideration the necessity to enhance her English language skills because of the enrollment in an EMI university program in Almaty, at first Zhuldyz had to deploy memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies as illustrated in the following way:

Extract 11:

I was struggling when I started my university studies in English. We had to write academic papers, I was shocked and immediately signed up for the English courses. I started studying as much as I could, I was trying to read different books in English. But the most helpful thing was listening to the course lectures from 9AM to 6PM five days a week. Even though I did not understand, I was very focused and probably it helped more than the courses which I attended for four months only. But I could not answer any questions in English, so I had to memorize things by heart, like learning a poem. (Zhuldyz, November 21, 2019).

As can be observed, memorization techniques (i.e., memory strategies) were still implemented even at the university level due to a lack of the appropriate knowledge and skills that were needed in order to participate in course activities. In similar fashion, by paying attention during lectures, self-evaluating and organizing her own learning (i.e., metacognitive strategies), and by reading books in English (i.e., cognitive strategies), Zhuldyz was seeking ways to enhance her language skills. Similar experiences and learning

efforts were described by the other four participants (Indira, Aliya, Sanzhar and Aigerim). In addition, Zhuldyz was implementing social strategies by approaching her peers with an EMI school background (e.g., NIS, Bilim-Innovation lyceums) who also had IELTS certificates which she did not have at that time. In other words, she would ask them for correction of her assignments thus cooperating with proficient users of English. Likewise, Aliya described her experience during her undergraduate years as follows:

Extract 12:

One of the English instructors that we had at the university conducted our English lessons in Kazakh (instructions, greetings), and whenever she would ask questions I was actively responding as I always sat in the front, completed all the homework assigned. I was interested in learning English effectively, and I fulfilled the tasks not for the sake of grades. It always bothered me that the lessons were in Kazakh. Also, the instructor knew a lot but never shared much with us, so I was always the one initiating discussions, like, “teacher, look, we had to do this task, let’s discuss”, and because of that my classmates were always angry with me. (Aliya, November 20, 2019).

The above interview extract reveals the way in which Aliya utilized some social strategies by actively engaging in class activities, showing initiative to ask for clarification, verification, and correction when possible. Equally, Aliya was willing to improve her English skills thus pushing herself to take risks even at the stake of looking foolish or disappointing her peers (i.e., affective strategies).

In addition, due to such similar situations where poor English education was provided in their universities, Aigerim and Moldir attended language courses during the first university years. Those experiences led to positive effects as their strategic efforts corresponded with

the previously mentioned ways of setting particular language learning goals, seeking professional help and thus arranging their own learning (i.e., metacognitive strategies).

### **The Influence of Mediating Social Agents.**

The second main theme that emerged from the interview data is categorized as “the influence of mediating social agents” and consists of the categories such as “family members”, “peers’ influence”, and “English instructors’ practices”. The participants of the present study elaborated on the impacts of various social agents that played important roles to encourage or shape both their attitude to English and LLS use.

#### ***Family Members.***

In this study, the concept of family refers to the participants’ immediate family members such as parents, sisters or brothers (Gao, 2006). Damir’s parents had always been supportive in regard to the English language education, and “they would have even paid for a private English language tutor” if he had asked but simultaneously it would have been too expensive. Olzhas shared that it was his mother’s initiative for him to attend additional English language courses when he was a child:

Extract 13:

At the time I did not understand why I was learning English, but I trusted my parents and believed in what they thought was good for me. I was not showing any resistance or passion during the classes – I just did what I was told. With time, I began to become more involved and interested in the learning process because I started to understand the meanings of the songs in English that I liked a lot... (Olzhas, November 22, 2019).

In other words, Olzhas had never experienced a noticeable lack of moral or financial support from his family in relation to his English language study when he was in secondary school. Olzhas had access to a rather appropriate language learning environment that supported his

LLS use thus developing his English learning motivational orientation. Likewise, another participant, Anel, divulged that her mother had an English teaching education background, so she was singing English lullabies to Anel as a baby (that she still remembers), as well as teaching her daughter some English words. Anel described her experience in the following way:

Extract 14:

My love for the English language started developing when I was a child. Mostly thanks to the kindergarten I attended and thanks to my mother who would always assist me with English and encourage me to learn it. So, in my early childhood, such factors shaped my positive feelings and a positive attitude towards English. (Anel, November 22, 2019).

That is, in the case of the two participants (Olzhas and Anel), some effective strategies orchestrated by their parents played an important role in their language development. In addition, both musical factors and positive statements by others (i.e., affective strategies) shaped their strong interest in the target language and culture. Moreover, Saule declared that she first started attending English courses in primary school due to her mother's initiative – for “future employment”. Despite not realizing the importance of English at a young age, Saule developed a strong interest eventually, as well as she was grateful for the opportunity she had. Having had the environment to practice English skills, the proficiency level increased naturally, which demonstrates the cognitive and social strategic efforts made in order to achieve her mother's initial goal of signing Saule up for the English classes (e.g., practicing English naturally and cooperating with others).

### ***Peers' Influence.***

In addition to the influence by family members, some of the study participants (e.g., Aigerim and Aliya) expressed their classmates' and peers' impact on their strategic efforts

and motivation to improve English. For instance, commenting on her peers' influence in her first job, Aigerim shared:

Extract 15:

The colleagues in my first job were “Bolashak” alumni, they all studied abroad in English, and I was the only person who went to a local university. So, they motivated me in a way that I wanted to speak English and be like them. Also, back in my hometown, in my environment there no one was truly realizing the importance of English, and no one wanted to learn English. I used to be just like them. (Aigerim, November 23, 2019).

This extract demonstrates the influence of motivational attitude towards language learning in order to achieve goals. In addition, the “Bolashak” program that the participant mentioned refers to a prestigious Kazakhstani state scholarship that strong candidates can obtain through a competition in order to study abroad. In this sense, it might be suggested that Aigerim was motivated to develop not only her English skills, but she was willing to strive for something better than she had known in the past (i.e., affective strategies). Furthermore, commenting on her peers in language learning at the university, another participant said:

Extract 16:

During the first year of my undergraduate studies, my classmates were quite proficient in English, but I had a speaking barrier in English. So, at the time, an influencing factor for me was competitiveness. I understood that there were people who spoke better English than I did. Even though my grammar and vocabulary were good, my speaking skills were truly bad. So, during that time, I was going to the university library first thing in the morning in order to study all day. (Aliya, November 20, 2019).

This extract indicates that the classroom environment at the university motivated this participant to overcome her speaking barrier. In particular, the superiority of her peers played an important role in becoming the driving force for the development of the English skills. That is, because of the peers' influence, Aliya set specific learning goals by organizing and planning her own learning (i.e., metacognitive strategies).

***English Instructors' Practices before Joining the EMI Program.***

As for the English language instructors' influence on LLS and motivation, Aliya described her experience with a native English-speaker, who was a volunteer teaching English in Kazakhstan, in the following way:

Extract 17:

She, the volunteer at our university, was golden. She would talk to you in a way that just made you feel better. She was from Wales and had a cool accent. She always prepared interesting exercises on speaking, reading and writing skills. I improved my English-speaking skills a lot. I remember how I had my first long conversation in English with her. I noticed my progress as I could express myself in English freely. I could understand what she was saying easily. Moreover, we still keep in touch as I have been good friends with her and her family since 2013. (Aliya, November 20, 2019).

That is, this social agent played a significant role in regard to Aliya's self-confidence as well as helped her to enhance the English language skills, eliminate the speaking barrier.

Moreover, as those classes were voluntary, Aliya intentionally attended them in order to cooperate with a native speaker, practice English, and develop her skills in English (i.e., social strategies). Similarly, another participant, Aigerim, also shared how helpful such help from native speakers was:

Extract 18:

During the last year of my undergraduate studies, I was attending an English club, conducted by English native speakers, and it was organized at my university... They would always listen to us carefully and with interest. They were very supportive. That is why I love foreigners. The sessions were once a week, free of charge, we were discussing various topics and playing games in English. It helped me to improve English a lot. (Aigerim, November 23, 2019).

Consequently, in the above-mentioned cases, the positive personality traits of the English language instructors, their encouragement provided both Aliya and Aigerim with the opportunity to succeed in improving their language skills. They had favorable and enabling conditions for progress where they felt comfortable freely practicing English (i.e., social strategic efforts).

Another participant, Zhuldyz, after failing the English course during her first undergraduate study year, had to retake the course in the summer by attending an intensive English course with a local English teacher who helped her to upgrade her language level from Pre-Intermediate to Intermediate:

Extract 19:

We were studying English five days a week for five hours in a row, the course lasted for a month and a half. We had a very demanding instructor who would tell us: "I don't care if you don't understand me, not my problems, read more in English!". I liked his teaching approach. I was very interested and focused during the classes, and I worked hard, fulfilling all the home tasks. He also managed to create a very friendly environment where no one felt shy: in my previous courses, even though I knew the answers sometimes, I did not answer as there were students with a better English

proficiency. This instructor could get us interested and inspire us which are the most important things. (Zhuldyz, November 21, 2019).

As illustrated in the above interview Extract 19, Zhuldyz shared that the summer English classes were productive and entertaining, as well as they contributed to her English language learning. The instructor maximized his students' language interest and engagement. This extract highlights how such an experience influenced her level of engagement and willingness to improve English. Zhuldyz's English instructor acted as a critical agent that contributed to her adaptation of a specific LLSs set by centering her own learning and practicing (i.e., metacognitive and cognitive strategies).

### **The Mediating Role of Objects.**

For most of the study participants multimedia technologies and the Internet played a vital role in learning and mastering English. Those participants who were born and raised in a rural area (Aliya, Sanzhar, Indira and Aigerim) did not have access to the Internet resources when learning English:

Extract 20:

...I come from a rural area, where there are no foreigners, hence no opportunities to practice English with native speakers. At that time when I started learning English, in 2005-2006, we did not even have the Internet. The only source we had was our teacher. (Aliya, November 20, 2019).

The extract highlights the importance of educators since they are usually the only resource in the rural areas even in the present days. The necessity of using technologies for learning is linked back to the issues of inexperienced or low-qualified teaching staff or lack of other learning materials in both rural and urban areas of Kazakhstan. As for the participants (Aliya, Sanzhar, Indira and Aigerim), after moving to the cities, all of them obtained access to the Internet. Therefore, in order to improve English skills, they and the other study participants



embraced a specific set of voluntary LLSs such as listening to English music or podcasts, watching or reading content in English. In other words, the participants used various resources and platforms on the Internet. For instance, some of them (Aliya, Zhuldyz, Anara, Olzhas and Anel) have been listening to English songs for relaxation and learning purposes, as they usually translate the lyrics hence learn new vocabulary and phrases (i.e., affective and cognitive strategies). Echoing this point, Zhuldyz and Olzhas declared:

Extract 21:

I have always been listening to music in English, so that I have never had any problems with my pronunciation or with listening skills. I especially like to listen to English rap, like, Eminem. Even if I sometimes do not understand some words, I still listen, because, with time, you understand more words in certain contexts, even instinctively. (Zhuldyz, November 21, 2019).

Extract 22:

I started listening to music in English as a child, and it is connected with my childhood memories: I remember how I asked my mother “how long am I going to have to learn English?”, and she turned on a music channel on TV saying “when you understand all of this, then stop”... I recommend listening to music when learning a language... When I was bored, I remember how I practiced English by listening to music and trying to write down what they were singing, trying to spell out their words, then I would compare my version with the original lyrics. With time and practice, I began to understand more of what they were singing about. (Olzhas, November 22, 2019).

This extract clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of metacognitive strategic efforts in relation to setting a goal in order to understand the meanings behind the participant’s favorite songs, organizing and systematizing language practice by listening to the songs and writing

down the lyrics. In other words, Olzhas as a child identified the most useful approach to language learning and LLSs that helped him to excel at understanding English (i.e., metacognitive LLSs).

Some other participants (Anara, Moldir and Sanzhar), prior to joining the EMI program, preferred to watch YouTube videos in English for language development (e.g., entertainment, tutorials, vlogs); as commented by Sanzhar:

Extract 23:

When I was learning English, I usually watched different bloggers on YouTube, and the most interesting thing for me was the pronunciation – not even grammar or anything like that. I really liked British accents, so I would intentionally watch only British bloggers. I also liked watching design tutorials in English. (Sanzhar, November 23, 2019).

In the above extract, Sanzhar locates the personal interest and strategic effort that enable language development with the help of YouTube. Moreover, he also added:

Extract 24:

After graduating from university, in order to enhance my English skills, I communicated in English with random people in the online chat rooms. There was this website where you could join the online chat rooms in order to practice English with people from all over the world who were also learning English. So, it motivated me when I was meeting people with a more advanced proficiency in English. Ultimately, I wouldn't have improved my English without the Internet resources. (Sanzhar, November 23, 2019).

As described in Extract 24, this participant also deployed cognitive and metacognitive strategic efforts by seeking ways to practice English and cooperate with the more proficient speakers using the Internet resources. It is worth noting that Sanzhar realizes the importance

of the Internet and the information and communication technology (ICT) that helped him to improve English communication skills.

In addition, some of the other participants (Saule, Anel and Indira) watched YouTube English lesson videos (e.g., IELTS, General English), which is underpinned by their educational purposes for utilizing the Internet. Other participants (Anara, Damir, Anel, Indira) expressed their voluntary strategic efforts by watching TV shows, cartoons and films in English. Additionally, Anara also mentioned her motivation to strengthen the English skills due to her love for anime (a style of Japanese film and television animation) which she would always watch in English with the English subtitles. Two participants (Anara and Sanzhar) have been watching YouTube interviews in English (e.g., with celebrities, successful people) on a regular basis, which also helps them to expand their English vocabulary. Moreover, five participants (Indira, Anara, Saule, Olzhas and Moldir) find reading books and other materials in English very useful in order to increase the vocabulary repertoire. To summarize, the above-mentioned LLSs fall into the category of affective and metacognitive strategic efforts due to the nature of self-organization and purposeful creation of structure for language development (metacognitive), as well as due to the utilization of music and other naturalistic language learning tools (affective).

Six participants (Indira, Zhuldyz, Saule, Damir, Olzhas and Sanzhar) mentioned a crucial role of Internet resources (e.g., Google Translate and ‘Grammarly’) in their language use and development, as can be demonstrated in the following interview extract:

Extract 25:

Since I have problems with spelling, I have to memorize words or utilize online autocorrection (i.e., ‘Grammarly’). Online autocorrection is essential... The computer automatically fixes spelling and grammar for me. Also, some Internet applications and resources may be unreliable, but at least they can always give you a general idea of a

particular issue. Technologies help me a lot, and I truly don't even know how I would have studied here (in this EMI program) if it hadn't been for the Internet, my mobile phone and laptop – it would have been difficult. (Olzhas, November 22, 2019).

Despite the use of memorization strategies in the past, Olzhas has been able to cope with his challenges with the help of the Internet resources.

### **Academic and Linguistic Challenges Encountered during the EMI Program.**

Being master's students in an EMI program, for most of the study participants, this is their first experience of studying exclusively in English. That is, previously, the majority of the participants (Aliya, Indira, Saule, Anel, Sanzhar and Aigerim), studied either in Kazakh or Russian. Therefore, after joining the program, they immediately faced various academic and linguistic challenges in regard to both writing course term papers in English and presenting in English.

#### ***Writing Academic Papers in English.***

For the participants' program courses, there were three final papers they had to submit (minimum 3000-5000 words). When writing an academic paper, an essay or a research paper, it is essential to use a more formal writing which might be challenging. One of the participants, Zhuldyz, commented on that point as follows:

Extract 26:

Academic English is challenging for me since I have never studied it before. When writing final papers now and even when writing regular essays, it still is very difficult...So, when I write a paper, I usually have over 500 Google tabs opened... (Zhuldyz, November 21, 2019).

In other words, Zhuldyz attempted to overcome the existing challenge in writing a paper with the help of using the Internet resources (i.e., compensation strategies). Another participant, Indira, also described her concern:

## Extract 27:

I have difficulties when selecting words for a written work as I tend to choose the wrong vocabulary. Perhaps I just don't 'feel' this language at all. I can paraphrase and all...But when I see a word and look for its synonym, I don't quite understand if it is suitable for a specific context... Sometimes our Academic English instructor after reviewing my papers leaves a comment "awkward". (Indira, November 20, 2019).

This extract shows that despite having a rather good level of English, students still face difficulties in choosing the appropriate meaning of the words. Furthermore, seven participants (Anara, Damir, Olzhas, Anel, Moldir, Sanzhar and Aigerim) mentioned their challenges with analysis and synthesis while working on an academic paper, as well as with finding and gathering appropriate literature. To illustrate, Olzhas and Sanzhar shared the following:

## Extract 28:

We have to read and analyze a lot when writing final papers. Firstly, I try to organize an outline firstly with my ideas. I read a lot of materials, then write out the main ideas from those sources in bullet points, I use stickers for page and main points' references... I am very comfortable working this way, structurally. (Olzhas, November 22, 2019).

## Extract 29:

We have to read a lot of academic papers in this program, and not just read but analyze all the information as well... I am a slow reader, so sometimes there is not enough time to read everything in detail... Also, we have to search the appropriate literature, and it can also be challenging – finding relevant information. (Sanzhar, November 23, 2019).

Both extracts demonstrate the common difficulties and issues in academic writing that were mentioned by the majority of the participants. Most of the participants received zero or minimal exposure to formal instruction of academic writing during their high school and university education. Three participants (Olzhas, Sanzhar and Zhuldyz) pointed out the necessity to organize a detailed outline or a mind map prior to writing a paper, which can be a good way to ensure that ideas come across in a clear and logical order (i.e., metacognitive strategies).

Two participants (Olzhas and Moldir) mentioned their challenges with the American Psychological Association (APA) formatting style of the written assignments that are used in this master's program. Olzhas reflected on his experience and explained how practice could facilitate the process of writing a paper:

Extract 30:

I think any improvements come with experience and practice. Theory is necessary, but practice is more important. So, as for my difficulties with APA, now I am just practicing by writing a huge amount of drafts. Then, I would go to the course instructors for revision and corrections. However, I believe that no one can influence you from the outside, you need to solve problems individually, on your own. (Olzhas, November 22, 2019).

As can be seen, even though the participant asks for corrections, clarifications and help from the course instructors (i.e., social strategies), he believes that self-monitoring, individual approach and self-motivation (i.e., metacognitive strategies) are essential when it comes to language development.

### ***Oral Presentations in English.***

As has already been mentioned, during the participants' program courses, there are numerous oral presentations: individual, in pairs or in small groups. In addition, in their

program, the participants need to actively engage in classroom discussions, express their opinions in English, and answer questions as these are assessed. It is usually challenging for non-native speakers to switch between languages effortlessly, and most participants mentioned various factors influencing their lack of confidence in speaking English. For example, two participants (Moldir and Anara) shared their personal concerns when presenting and speaking in English:

Extract 31:

Well, I can't express my thoughts correctly when I'm worried. I just can't. And because of my quiet voice people often can't hear me. Also, I have a fear that the professors do not like me, that they do not see enough potential in me. Maybe there really isn't much of it indeed, or maybe it's all in my head. (Moldir, November 22, 2019).

Extract 32:

I honestly find it difficult to speak, and it's not even because of the English language. My public speaking skills are just not developed, and when I answer during our classes, I always think about the structure in my head. But I can sometimes get lost and forget words, which is a psychological aspect. (Anara, November 20, 2019).

Lack of experience and exposure mainly affected the participants' psychological state for which some of them were afraid in the first presentations. Most participants (Aliya, Anara, Saule, Olzhas, Anel and Moldir) with such speaking difficulties in English expressed their willingness to join a public speaking development club on campus in the following semester in order to cooperate with other students, practice their English-speaking skills and learn how to be a better presenter (i.e., social strategies).

On the contrary, Sanzhar found the help from his course instructors useful in relation to his first ever speaking presentation in English and initial challenges:

Extract 33:

When we first presented, we didn't handle the time management, as we couldn't compress all the information. We didn't have consistency, and right during the presentation, we had a discrepancy. This was the very first experience during this program. Then, we learned how to do everything. Personally, I do not experience any difficulties in speaking or presenting in English now, as teachers immediately give feedback, they tell us what and how not to do. Now I have some experience. (Sanzhar, November 23, 2019).

In addition, some participants (Zhuldyz, Saule, Olzhas and Sanzhar) compose mind maps and outlines with bullet points for oral presentations in English which they find helpful and essential (i.e., cognitive strategies).

### **Learning Goals and Motivation.**

The last question of the interview focused on language learning goals and motivation. Therefore, reflecting on their language learning experiences and LLSs, the study participants pointed out the importance of both motivation and setting specific learning goals in order to overcome their academic and linguistic challenges. For instance, in relation to motivation in language development, Saule and Zhuldyz concluded in their interviews:

Extract 34:

Currently, the biggest motivation for me to keep improving my English skills is my desire to speak it fluently, because I have spent so many years learning it. It wouldn't be reasonable to give up on it now. Also, since everyone speaks English now, there is competitiveness which also motivates me. (Saule, November 21, 2019).



Extract 35:

I set myself a few language goals such as to speak more in English and read books in English. I am currently reading a book from the university library, which is difficult but interesting. (Zhuldyz, November 21, 2019).

On the contrary, another participant, Olzhas, shared a different perspective:

Extract 36:

I think at this point I am not going to do anything to improve my English because the times when I was learning it have passed. Now I can only practice my skills, and the knowledge I gained needs to be utilized for my personal goals. So, being a student in this EMI program, the English-speaking environment provides me with enough practice and experience rather than the learning of the language itself. (Olzhas, November 22, 2019).

A similar conclusion was drawn by another participant in the following way:

Extract 37:

Nowadays I have no motivation to improve my English, I just need to pass the program courses. I have no problems with my English now. I reckon that I have reached my limit. Perhaps, if I have any problems in the future, I will try some online courses such as “Coursera”. But for now, the language improvement is not a priority for me. (Sanzhar, November 23, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter presented the main findings on master’s students’ English language learning experiences and strategies at an EMI university in Kazakhstan, which were revealed through narrative writing and semi-structured interviews. The chapter began with a synopsis of each participant’s biography based on their essays, followed by a table with the counted strategies found in the interview data. The five main themes that emerged in the interview

data are: “past language learning experiences”, “the influence of mediating social agents”, “the mediating role of objects”, “academic and linguistic challenges encountered during the EMI program”, and “learning goals and motivation”. The findings illustrate the language learning experiences of 11 participants with different backgrounds, including their contextualized and dynamic nature of strategic learning efforts.

In response to the research questions of this study, various opinions and ideas on LLSs emerged in the interview data, hence the participants’ strategic efforts were divided into compulsory (formal learning) and voluntary (informal learning) strategies. The results demonstrated that voluntary strategies were used the most by the participants as they were considered to be more effective for them. Personal motivation and interest in the English language influenced the participants’ choice and use of the voluntary strategies. Additionally, there was influence for the participants’ language learning and development from their family members, English instructors and peers. Also, the role of the Internet resources and information technologies has proven to be beneficial to the participants in relation to their academic and linguistic challenges. To conclude, the findings presented in this chapter will be explained in relation to the theoretical framework and empirical literature in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings illustrated in the previous chapter were based on the data obtained from the essays and semi-structured interviews with an EMI program's 11 graduate students. The following chapter focuses on the discussion of those findings in relation to the existing literature on the topic. The present study is the first empirical study in the field of LLSs in Kazakhstan, and it adopted a sociocultural perspective. The purpose was to attain a rich and contextualized picture of a group of Kazakhstani master's students' language learning experiences, underlying their strategy uses and learning goals while studying at an elite EMI university in Kazakhstan. Therefore, the following research questions, presented at the end of Chapter 1, needed to be answered:

1. What are the particular patterns of learning strategies used by the participants?
2. What influenced the participants' choices and use of strategies?

Consequently, this chapter presents two major sections devoted to the first and second research questions with the appropriate subthemes.

### **RQ1: What are the particular patterns of learning strategies used by the participants?**

To address the first research question, a table of counted learning strategies used by the participants was presented in Chapter 4. The present study adapted Griffiths and Oxford's (2014) approach to strategy classification, "by reporting the patterns of strategy use displayed in the data according to the participants' experiential accounts and their language learning goals rather than any pre-existing classification system" (p. 2). There were two key points considered when counting the participants' strategy use in the interview data (see Table 1 in Chapter 4): 1) when a particular participant made several references to the same strategy in the interview, only one count was taken; and 2) language learning experiences were divided into two phases (i.e., school level of education and during their preparation for IELTS, and tertiary education). In addition, the participants' strategy use was classified into two main

categories: “compulsory strategies” and “voluntary strategies”. The compulsory strategies were used under teachers’ or parents’ regulation and associated with formal education (e.g., grade-getting), whereas the voluntary strategies were those used because of the participants’ individual interest in learning and improving their English language (Hajar, 2020).

### **Compulsory Strategies.**

Compulsory strategies include exam-taking necessities with “direct involvement or coercion of some influential social agents, principally teachers and parents” (Hajar, 2020, p. 7). As a result, ten main corresponding strategy items emerged in the interview data:

- memorizing assignments and vocabulary;
- translating and writing down new vocabulary;
- translating texts from English to Kazakh or Russian;
- asking questions during lessons;
- writing out grammar rules and tips, re-reading them;
- attending language courses or working with a tutor;
- working on test/exam sample materials;
- using international English textbooks;
- listening to cassettes;
- attending consultations with teachers (i.e., office hours).

During her English lessons at school, Indira, had to memorize assignments and new words due to lack of appropriate English skills and insufficient teaching methods. She then continued to deploy such strategic efforts along with the other four participants (Zhuldyz, Olzhas, Sanzhar, and Aigerim) during their university education. Similarly, due to the same reasons, other participants (Aliya, Anara, and Anel) translated and wrote down new vocabulary at school, and another participant (Moldir) did the same during university.

Translating texts from English to Kazakh or Russian as part of their English lessons were

strategic efforts for Anel and Aigerim at school. Another participant (Aliya) was always active during English lessons, asking questions for clarification and other learning purposes both at school and university; and another participant (Saule) used to write down English grammar rules and re-read them for learning purposes during her school lessons.

Furthermore, attending an English language private school or hiring a private tutor were common strategic practices for most of the participants (Indira, Anara, Saule, Olzhas, Anel, Moldir, Sanzhar, Zhuldyz, and Aigerim) because of the insufficient knowledge provided during school and university education. As a result, in most cases, the participants were satisfied with the teaching quality; some participants (Zhuldyz, Anel, and Moldir) lost their motivation to learn English in high school, but it came back when they attended private English lessons. The notion of “shadow education” or “private tutoring” played a mediating role in their English language learning and strategy uses, similar to Hajar’s (2019) and Yung’s (2015) empirical studies with Arab and Chinese students respectively. In addressing the point of preferring private tutoring, Yung’s (2015) study of 14 Chinese learners, who received English private tutoring (EPT) during their secondary education in Hong Kong, reported that the participants had ambivalent and paradoxical attitudes toward EPT. In other words, although they regarded EPT essential for their education, they did not consider it as the most effective way to improve their English proficiency because of its excessive focus on examination skills instead of the use of English as a language of global communication. Similarly, even though the participants of this study mentioned the benefits of EPT, they also expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the similarities of EPT with their school education. Consequently, since the world of shadow education exists beyond the boundaries of mainstream classroom settings, further research is needed to help researchers and practitioners appreciate the unforeseen consequences of educational changes and their fundamental impact on learning as mediated by sociocultural conditions.

Moreover, working on sample test or exam sample exercises while preparing for international exams (i.e., IELTS) or state graduation tests was a common strategy effort for the four participants (Aliya, Anel, Moldir, and Sanzhar) during their school education, and for Indira during her university experience. Three of the study participants (Anara, Saule, and Damir) utilized international instead of local English language learning materials during their time at school and university; as well as another participant (Damir) listened to cassettes during his school lessons for listening practice (e.g., daily conversations between native English speakers). In addition, Aliya used to visit her school teachers during office hours for extra help with English due to the necessity of preparing for the exams and for improving her English as she was interested in the language itself; Olzhas did the same during his university studies. It may be argued that most participants, prior to attending university, did not noticeably recognize the potential importance of English in their lives, mainly because their future self-image as English speakers or users was not nurtured at school or home (Hajar, 2019; Magid & Chen, 2012; Ueki & Takeuchi, 2014). They considered English as “just another subject on the school curriculum, quite divorced from the powerful resonances which it might have in the communities where it is used” (Lamb & Budiyo, 2013, p. 19).

### **Voluntary Strategies.**

Voluntary strategies, as Hajar (2020) describes, refer to the language learning efforts made by a learner because of their individual interest and motivation to enhance and master their language proficiency. That is, they are “more likely to be regulated by the learners’ selves and less likely to be passed on by others” (Hajar, 2020, p. 4). The emerged strategic items include such practices as follows:

- seeking opportunities to practice English outside the classroom and participating in English clubs with native speakers;
- listening to music and podcasts in English in order to learn new vocabulary;

- translating English lyrics;
- watching YouTube videos (i.e., entertainment, tutorials, and English lessons);
- watching TV content in English (i.e., cartoons, TV series, films, and anime);
- using the Internet resources for practice (i.e., online chat rooms, online learning platforms, and translators);
- composing mind maps and outlines for assignments (i.e., written and speaking), self-motivating (i.e., affective strategies);
- seeking help from more proficient peers;
- reading in English (i.e., books and academic materials).

Therefore, the presented findings revealed that the nature of LLSs is not stable since they did not operate alone and “were motivated by specific objectives” in order to “fulfill specific goals” (Donato & McCormick, 1994, p. 455). In addition, for the majority of the study participants, English was more than a subject on the school curriculum, so that since the early stages of their English learning, they deployed various voluntary strategies (e.g., watching content or listening to music in English), which in return illustrates the dynamic nature of LLSs used. Consequently, those participants were more engaged with English for personal reasons and pleasure. As a result, the majority of the study participants used to deploy these voluntary strategies due to various reasons which will be discussed in more detail in the upcoming section.

### **RQ2: What influenced the participants’ choices and use of strategies?**

For the second research question, it was necessary to address the possible factors influencing the participants’ choices and use of strategies. As a result, there were five main themes combined from the obtained interview data: “past language learning experiences”, “the influence of mediating social agents”, “the mediating role of objects”, “academic and

linguistic challenges encountered during the EMI program”, and “learning goals and motivation” (see Chapter 4).

As for the past language learning experiences, for the majority of the study participants, there were problems with the English teaching at their schools; hence, they needed to seek additional support from private tutors or language schools. That is, based on the participants’ experiential accounts, it can be inferred that many of their English classes may have been monotonous, unchallenging, teacher-centered, and focused intensively on grammar instruction over the other language skills. Likewise, the analysis of the learners’ experiential narratives in Gao’s (2006) study showed that the participants’ LLS use was consistent with their changing contextual needs, and the Chinese learners of the study mainly used repetition, note-taking and rote memorisation strategies in their Chinese learning context because these LLSs provided them with an opportunity to pass exams and address both their teachers’ recommendations and their cultural beliefs which imply that “a person can memorize a word if she or he repeats it seven times” (Gao, 2006, p. 63). Related to this, during all stages of education (i.e., school and university), most of the present study’s participants’ English teachers had poor pronunciation, tended to use Russian or Kazakh more than half the time, interacted only with students who could understand their teaching on grammar and were inclined to focus predominantly on exam preparation, which was common for both secondary school and higher education. As a result, such educational approaches as the “grammar-translation method” might still be used in Kazakhstan in comparison to the more successful settings abroad where a “communicative approach is the foundation of foreign language teaching” (Irsaliyev et al., 2017, p. 160). In addition, the emphasis that most study participants placed on their English teachers’ incompetence seemingly aligns with Buckingham’s (2003) argument that “the single most important influence on student achievement is teacher quality” (p 71).



It can also be confirmed that “there is a big disparity in resources between urban and rural educational institutions” (Irsaliyev et al., 2017, p. 124). In his study, Lamb (2012) examined the motivation to learn English of Indonesian junior high school students in three distinct contexts: a metropolitan city, a provincial town, and a rural district; using the Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 motivational self-system as the theoretical framework, the study employed a survey to sample the views of 527 learners, and a C-test to evaluate their current level of English. As a result, motivation was found to be the same in strength and character in the two urban settings but noticeably different in the rural setting; and a positive view of the English learning experience was the strongest predictor of both motivated learning behavior and L2 proficiency, whereas the ideal L2 self was only a significant factor among the metropolitan group. Similarly, in my study, the participants who studied in city schools pointed out how they were motivated to learn English, especially due to using international learning materials, and had the possibility to attend private English schools. To compare, some participants who come from rural areas mentioned the lack of private language schools, qualified school teachers, learning resources, and lack of access to the Internet.

Moreover, the educational and financial backgrounds of the participants’ parents also affected the participants’ motivational orientation and deployment of effective strategies. For instance, there was a positive influence of studying abroad on the motivation to enhance English proficiency for several participants (i.e., Saule, Damir, and Olzhas). Their motivational strategies were partially developed as a result of their educated parents’ efforts to send them abroad and enroll them in private educational establishments with competent or native speakers of English, thus, attempting to create opportunities for language learners to “speak as themselves” in addition to expressing “their own preferred meanings, interests and identities through the medium of English” (Ushioda, 2011, p. 17). With this in mind, having such past language learning experiences seemed to play an essential role in enhancing their

identity formation as English speakers. Similarly, in a study of a group of 24 Hong Kong primary-school children learning English, in order to respond to the issue of understanding how they position themselves as speakers of a foreign language, a photo-elicitation method was implemented (Besser & Chik, 2014). As a result, two visible narratives of identity were found: “cosmopolitans” (i.e., seemed to draw on multiple resources, largely based on their access to the social and economic benefits of using a great variety of English learning opportunities and popular culture media), and “pragmatist” (i.e., had fewer resources and were more uncertain about their future learning opportunities). That is, this study illustrates the importance of considering how educational policy, cultural values, and distribution of resources might influence young learners studying in similar contexts.

Furthermore, in addition to the above-mentioned parents’ mediating role in developing particular LLSs and attitude to the language, there was also the influence from other social agents (i.e., peers’ influence and English instructors, native speakers). That is, in the sociocultural perspective adopted in this study, language learners’ strategy use is not only seen as a result of their individual cognitive choices, as it is also viewed as related to the mediation of particular learning communities (Gao, 2006, p. 6). In their interviews, some study participants mentioned the influence of their successful peers or family members, and how, in return, they were encouraged to strive to be better or to be the best; and if learners’ strategic behavior is theorized as learners’ exercise of agency (i.e., an ability of active participation) to discover new means of learning, an inquiry into language learners’ strategic learning may reveal the dynamic interaction between language learners’ agency and social structure, as well as deepen our understanding of learners’ strategic learning as shaped by interaction (Gao, 2007).

Considering the educational problems reported by the study participants as well as that English is not anyone’s native language in Kazakhstan (Smagulova, 2007), in order to

deal with their English language learning challenges, all of them were forced to implement the above-mentioned voluntary strategies. In other words, even though there were cases when the participants turned to technologies and other resources because of their genuine interest in improving English, some participants had to take control of their learning out of mere necessity (e.g., to meet the demands of their educational programs or to find a job). As demonstrated in Chapter 4, the participants were ingenious in manipulating the complex linguistic situations to develop their LLSs and academic socialization, so that their active efforts to turn linguistic constraints into a facilitative learning environment revealed their agency in taking control of their own language learning and participating in the local student community (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Oxford, 2003). Consequently, perhaps in most cases without realizing it, the participants deployed the use of metacognitive LLSs, as metacognitive strategies are “general skills through which learners manage, direct, regulate, and guide their learning, planning, monitoring, and evaluation” (Wenden, 1998, p. 519). In addition, similarly, in a study by Lai and Gu (2011) on Hong Kong university students’ use of technology outside the classroom, the interview data revealed that the language learners were using technology to engage in out-of-class activities in order to manage various aspects of their language learning experience. The majority of them perceived technology-enhanced out-of-class learning experiences very positively, as they deployed a variety of technologies for language learning (i.e., online dictionaries, social media; used YouTube to find interesting audiovisual materials and used online forums to read what other people were discussing). As for the nature of their technology use, six distinct aspects of their self-regulation of language learning using technology were found: “to regulate emotions and enhance the attraction of learning; to plan, evaluate, and monitor their learning progress; to enhance social connections with and seek help from native speakers and other peer learners around the world; to encourage oneself to persevere and commit to the learning goal; to seek and expand learning

resources; and to enhance cultural understanding” (Lai & Gu, 2011, p. 325). Among the six factors, the participants reported positive perceptions of and engagement with the use of technology for “goal commitment regulation, resource regulation, cultural learning regulation, and affection regulation” (Lai & Gu, 2011, p. 325). In other words, they demonstrated metacognitive knowledge and LLSs for learning a language with the help of technologies.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, in their article on the changing perspectives of a “good language learner” (GLL), Norton and Toohey (2001) explored the language learning experiences of two Polish immigrants in Canada, Eva and Julie. For them, English was the main means of communication, and their LLSs suggested such strategies as managing their own learning and working on it systematically. As a result, they both were considered GLLs, and the authors argued that a particular present of social factors had a positive influence on their language success. In other words, despite initial communication challenges and hesitation, Eva was the one who started conversations with her colleagues at the workplace, and Julie had a possibility to practice the language with her kindergarten teacher and peers. This way, their ability to communicate and engage with co-workers and peers demonstrated their human agency, and, thus, successful utilization of effective strategies deployed in order to achieve their goals.

Two study participants (Anara and Sanzhar) with different backgrounds (elite EMI urban school and rural school respectively) were found to have progressively adopted a variety of strategic behaviors to increase their exposure to English and to use English in their local contexts (i.e., metacognitive and social LLSs). For instance, Anara, during her school education, regularly listened to music in English and watched English TV programs; after graduating from high school and moving to the city, Sanzhar used to watch English lessons on YouTube. In addition to these strategic moves, both of them sought opportunities and

invested their time and energy in socializing with English native speakers (i.e., Anara spent time showing her city to the foreign school teachers, and Sanzhar established English-speaking partnerships with other English learners on various online platforms).

Consequently, as they embraced possible language learning opportunities, their strategy use could be viewed as a result of the interplay between their agency and contextual realities, both having mediated their language learning (Gao, 2007, 2010).

As can be seen in this study, the participants' narratives and the presented findings in Chapter 4, the majority of the participants seemed to have also been effective in managing the language learning process as they displayed great metacognitive capacity. Their persistence in searching for opportunities to practice English as a means of achieving high levels of competence not only illustrates their understanding of the purpose of language learning, but also suggests their self-motivation, self-encouragement, and social factors' influence. Acting on such realizations, the learners deployed their strategic efforts appropriately as demonstrated in the examples of the previous chapter. This finding is in agreement with that of Norton and Toohey (2001) who argued that the proficiencies of the GLLs were not only built up individually but were also connected with the "possibilities various communities could offer them" (p. 318). With this in mind, as Gao (2006) concluded, the choice of learners' LLS use is the result of not only their personal motivation and mental processes, but also the social context of learning and "the mediating agents, including teachers, learning experts, and family members" (p. 64). That is, in his study, three types of social agents were identified as having mediated their development as English language learners: the participants' family, English teachers and peers.

Moreover, in Gao's (2006) study, many participants also reported that they used similar to this study LLSs that worked well for exams in China. Similarly, the participants of the present study also referred to memorization strategies for examinations and tests during

school and higher education. Furthermore, in Gao's (2006) study, family members in China also influenced some of the participants' early development in learning strategies. For instance, for the two participants', whose mothers were English teachers, not only encouraged them to learn English when they were children but also sent them to private language schools for extra English exposure. Likewise, in my study, one participant (Anel) was introduced to English at a very young age due to her mother being an English language teacher; thus, her mother even sang lullabies to her in English. In Gao's (2006) article, for some participants, supportive English speakers were significant in assisting with difficulties and "facilitating changes in these learners' strategy use towards more regular uses of social and interactive strategies" (p. 63). As a result, some participants "stopped their uses of memorizing, note taking, and regular reviewing strategies to retain new words, and, instead, they relied on using more social strategies to guess, acquire, and apply meanings of new words in actual conversations" (Gao, 2006, p. 64).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to explain the findings presented in Chapter 4, linking them with the existing theoretical and empirical literature on the investigated topic, in order to answer the research questions appropriately. Moreover, the discussion was aimed to help readers understand more deeply the nature of LLSs used by the study participants as well as the reasons for deploying them. Therefore, the LLSs such as those in the sociocultural, metacognitive, affective, cognitive and social-interactional categories discussed in this chapter, are crucial because, as demonstrated, they can assist language learners not only in developing their identity as English speakers and advancing their linguistic skills, but also in motivating them to become independent English learners with the help of technologies.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The previous chapter considered the discussion of the main findings of this qualitative study based on two research methods: narrative writing and semi-structured interviews. The data were collected from 11 master's students of one elite EMI university in Nur-Sultan (previously Astana). The present chapter covers the major conclusions summarized in this research. The purpose of this study was to explore and obtain a rich and contextualized picture of a group of master's students' language learning experiences, underlying their strategy uses and learning goals. To attain the study purpose, the following research questions, presented at the end of Chapter 1, were necessary to be answered:

1. What are the particular patterns of learning strategies used by the participants?
2. What influenced the participants' choices and use of strategies?

Consequently, the main conclusions are drawn in this final chapter followed by the limitations of this study and further implications. Finally, recommendations are presented as well.

### Main Conclusions of the Study

The qualitative study reported in the current paper represents the first LLS study in Kazakhstan that explored the challenges, associated with LLS use and learning goals of a group of Kazakhstani master's students while studying in an EMI university in Kazakhstan. This study was underpinned by a sociocultural perspective, a perspective which has insufficiently been adopted in LLS research, as Hajar (2019) and Thomas and Rose (2018) claim. Furthermore, as stated in Chapter 1, there has been an increasing number of published studies in Asia concerned with individuals' language learning experience and LLSs which they deploy to accomplish their learning goals (e.g., Gao, 2010; Li & Ruan, 2015; Sun & Wang, 2020). Consequently, the following question was raised: "Where is the LLSs research from Kazakhstan?". Addressing this inquiry, the qualitative research study reported in this

master's thesis has, to some extent, redressed the above-mentioned research gaps by not only exploring the challenges that Kazakhstani master's students confronted while studying in an academic program at a Kazakhstani EMI university, but also examining these students' use of particular strategies mediated by various social agents, including their family members, language instructors, and peers. In addition, most previous LLS studies adopted a cognitive perspective and relied heavily on Oxford's (1990) SILL, which depicted students' LLS preferences rather than their actual and dynamic LLS uses.

The main purpose of this study was to explore master's students' experiences and practices with the English LLSs having been enrolled in an EMI program at one Kazakhstani university, and it might be fair to state that the posed objective was met. That is, the participants' particular patterns of learning strategies and influences of such choices were presented in Chapter 4, and explained in more detail in Chapter 5 in accordance with the existing theoretical and empirical literature on the investigated topic. Moreover, the discussion in Chapter 5 was aimed to help understand more deeply the nature of LLSs used by the study participants as well as the reasons for deploying them.

As a result, the two major strategy classifications that emerged according to the findings of the study are "compulsory" and "voluntary" (Hajar, 2015), where the compulsory ones suggest the LLS uses employed during formal education (i.e., assessment-based, exam- or test-oriented), and the voluntary ones refer to the strategies used due to the participants' personal interest and motivation in learning or improving English. Due to the participants' various past language learning experiences, including that of insufficient knowledge provided during their secondary and higher education prior to enrolling in their current EMI program, most of them were forced to deploy additional strategic efforts in order to succeed in learning English. That is, the LLSs such as those in the metacognitive, affective, cognitive and social-interactive categories discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, were crucial for the study participants



because they helped them to develop their English speaker identities as well as helping to advance their English proficiency and motivating them to become independent English learners. For instance, in their English lessons during formal education (both school and university), most of the participants had to memorize or translate texts and new vocabulary. Furthermore, the majority of them was forced to attend private English language courses or to hire English tutors in their search for additional help. In addition, while planning and organizing their own learning (i.e., metacognitive strategies) during their school and university education, the importance of multimedia technologies and Internet resources was greatly emphasized by all the study participants as such resources truly contributed to their English language improvement and assisted them with much help during the EMI program they were enrolled in.

In other words, there is a great emphasis on the dynamic nature of the LLSs, in which my participants changed and adopted new strategies in response to the new context and assessment scheme in their EMI program. For instance, after joining their current EMI program, the participants had to read numerous academic papers, analyze them in order to accomplish written assignments, and present in groups and individually. Also, besides the above-mentioned help from multimedia technologies and online resources, most of the participants had to seek additional help from their course instructors and Academic English instructors. Conversely, during their previous educational experiences, most participants could not seek help from their teachers due to teachers' low level of qualifications or unwillingness to assist. Many participants also mentioned the utilization of mind-maps and outlines during the EMI program, which was also proven to be helpful in coping with course assignments. As a result, the use of qualitative methods helped me to capture the dynamic aspect of their strategy use which would be difficult to gain from using LLS questionnaires.

Moreover, several participants, prior to joining the EMI program and employing the social LLSs, found English clubs with native speakers extremely helpful as they were exposed to more practice, creativity and encouragement from the native English speakers. In addition, much attention was also given to the role of family members and peers who expressed their support for the participants, motivated them, and even inspired them to enhance their linguistic skills. As described in Chapter 4, when addressing their current academic and linguistic goals, the study participants highlighted the essence of motivation and individual interest in learning a foreign language. In other words, throughout their past language learning experiences and up to this day, all the participants have been referring to the voluntary LLSs more, which continue to serve as the main strategic learning efforts for them.

There were numerous learning resources available to them, and many participants improved their language skills because of their individual interest, hence, once again, the voluntary strategies were proven to be the most useful for them (see Chapter 4). On the other hand, several participants shared how they no longer feel the need to deploy any LLSs due to their current proficiency level that allows them to implement their English language skills successfully, in most cases after a rather long linguistic journey. Also, some participants mentioned the presence of competition factors that drive them, particularly describing their current experiences and academic challenges being master's students in an EMI program. Namely, as mentioned before, the participants faced challenges with their written assignments (e.g., final term papers) and oral presentations (e.g., individual and in small groups), given that for most of them this was the first experience studying in English. Overall, as a result, the prevalent amount of the strategies deployed by the participants include the voluntary strategies presented in Table 1 of Chapter 4.

### **Limitations of the Study**

When considering the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings presented in this study, it is essential to take into account several limitations. One of them may be that 11 participants of this study constituted a relatively small sample of the Kazakhstan population. In addition, only the perspective of one particular program's (i.e., major) students was considered in the study. The participants also had not been asked to specifically list the LLSs they used and comment on them, hence the strategy items presented in Table 1 of Chapter 4 must be viewed with caution. In addition, I was limited by the time given for the conductance of this small-scale research. Perhaps the timing and the amount of additional coursework during the two academic semesters have stopped me from conducting a deeper research or finding more case studies related to my study. Finally, the study may also be limited due to looking only at English language academic papers (i.e., foreign and not local literature). Nonetheless, the present study has attempted to provide the first insight into what kinds of English language learning experiences Kazakhstani learners had, and the strategies they found most useful.

### **Further Implications**

Further local Kazakhstani studies are needed on the topics presented here. A mixed-methods approach could also cover a greater proportion of respondents and, thus, shed more light on learning experiences and LLSs. Consequently, possible variables may include not only the different areas of Kazakhstan but also different socioeconomic backgrounds, gender, age, goals, interests, travel experience and schooling. In addition, studies can be longitudinal so that to see the progression and change in LLSs use and language learning experiences within and across different settings, as described in Chapter 2, where some of the key theoretical ground for the study was explored. Moreover, future research could be directed toward the exploration of learner motivation when learning a foreign language in Kazakhstan.

Also, further studies can explore the language learning experiences and strategy uses of Kazakhstani students in different contexts, including possible comparisons between the urban and rural area backgrounds. Finally, more research could be dedicated to the presence, importance and influence of “shadow education” (i.e., private tutoring) in the Kazakhstani context.

### **Recommendations**

Since the findings of the present study could offer a myriad of significant insights to the MoES about the challenges that students and learners face throughout their formal studies in Kazakhstan in order to meet the academic and linguistic requirements, I can suggest some recommendations. Firstly, pedagogical practices in Kazakhstan and elsewhere may need to be more “transformative” in offering language learners enough space and opportunity to enforce their own agency, which may be achieved by incorporating digital and mobile technologies effectively into the classroom (Hajar, 2019, p. 247). As mentioned above, most of the study participants deployed voluntary strategies when both learning English and developing proficiency in English, hence more incorporation of the information and communication technology (ICT) may also need to be considered in the educational institutions as it can support, enhance, and optimize the delivery of new information within the classroom.

Finally, language learners also need support to accomplish long-term, not only short-term, goals. Most of the study participants expressed their opinions on how significant their current academic efforts were to them as they wished and hoped to advance and contribute to research in Kazakhstan. For such purposes, English acted as a means to achieve long-term goals. Consequently, one of the recommendations for assisting students with their long-term goals could be providing more support from the university regarding Academic English. For instance, it could be useful to add more hours of Academic English sessions as well as to

conduct academic workshops for master's students or to initiate and create a network of master's students where they could share their experiences and learn from one another.

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### **Appendix A: Initial Essay Questions**

1. Could you please write general information about your background (e.g., your parents' jobs, how many brothers and sisters you have, your city/village, your previous education).
2. When and how did you start learning English?
3. What was your perspective on learning English at that time?
4. When did you recognize the importance of English in your life?
5. What sort of problems did you usually have in learning English?
6. How did you usually sort those problems out?
7. What kind of challenges with Academic English are you now facing? How do you deal with them?

### **Вопросы для Предварительного Эссе**

1. Можете пожалуйста написать общую информацию о Вас (например, работа ваших родителей, сколько у вас братьев и сестер, откуда вы родом- город/деревня, кто вы по специальности).
2. Когда и как вы начали изучать английский язык?
3. Какова была ваша точка зрения об изучении английского языка в то время?
4. Когда вы осознали важность английского языка в своей жизни?
5. Какие проблемы у вас обычно возникали при изучении английского языка?
6. Как вы обычно решали эти проблемы?
7. С какими проблемами академического английского вы сейчас сталкиваетесь?  
Как вы с ними справляетесь?



### **Appendix B: Interview Protocol**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Researcher: Gulmira Batyrkhanova

Participant: Student

#### **Questions:**

1. Background questions based on an individual essay (see Appendix A).
2. How would you describe your current level of English now?
3. Is there any event or person that encouraged or discouraged you to learn English?
4. What are the reasons that made you join this academic program in English?
5. Has the current program been up to your expectations so far?
6. Are there any challenges you are facing now? If yes, how are you dealing with them?
7. Comparing you today and when you just joined the program, do you think there are any differences?
8. When you encounter new academic words, is there anything you do to learn them? If yes, what? How do you learn them?
9. Can you please describe your preparation process for the oral presentations in English that are part of this program?
10. Can you please describe how you plan to write or are writing the final papers (written assignments) that are also part of this program?
11. What about the role of technology in your life? Do you use it to improve your English or facilitate your academic study? If yes, how? If not, why not?
12. How do you find this program's instructors' teaching methods?
13. Are you motivated to enhance your English proficiency at this point? If yes, what are your current language learning goals and how do you plan to achieve them (i.e., strategies to achieve these goals)?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add? Thank you very much for your time!

### Протокол Интервью

Время интервью:

Дата:

Место проведения:

Исследователь: Гульмира Батырханова

Участник: Студент

#### Вопросы:

1. Вопросы общего характера, основанные на индивидуальном эссе (см. Appendix A).
2. Как бы вы могли оценить свой уровень английского на сегодняшний день?
3. Есть ли какое-нибудь событие или человек, который поощрял ваше изучение английского языка? Или, есть ли факторы или люди, которые могли воспрепятствовать вам в изучении английского?
4. Каковы причины, которые замотивировали Вас поступить на данную академическую программу на английском языке?
5. Соответствует ли эта программа вашим ожиданиям?
6. Есть ли какие-нибудь проблемы, с которыми вы сейчас сталкиваетесь? Если да, то как вы с ними справляетесь?
7. Сравнивая вас сегодня и когда вы только поступили на эту программу, есть какие-нибудь различия, которые вы заметили?
8. Когда вы встречаете новые академические слова, вы делаете что-нибудь для того, чтобы закрепить в памяти их? Если да, то что?
9. Как вы готовитесь к устным презентациям на английском языке в рамках этой программы? Опишите пожалуйста.
10. Можете ли вы описать как проходит процесс подготовки и написания письменных заданий в рамках программы?
11. А как насчет роли технологий в вашей жизни? Вы используете их, чтобы улучшить свой английский или для учебы на этой программе? Если да, то как? Если нет, то почему нет?
12. Что вы думаете о методах преподавания инструкторов на этой программе?
13. На сегодняшний день, у вас есть мотивация продолжать совершенствовать английский язык? Если да, то каковы ваши текущие цели изучения языка и как вы планируете их достичь (т.е., стратегии для достижения этих целей)?
14. Есть ли еще что-нибудь, чем бы вы хотели поделиться? Спасибо большое за ваше время!

## Appendix C: Consent Form

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Exploring Kazakhstani Master's Students' Language Learning Experiences and Strategy Uses in an English-Medium University in Kazakhstan: A Qualitative Inquiry

**DESCRIPTION:** You are invited to participate in a research study on the English language learning experience and strategies you use to improve the skills. In addition, the study will try to reveal master's students' challenges when it comes to learning the English languages. You will be asked to write a short essay about your learning experience and then participate in a face-to-face post-interview containing 10-15 questions in English or Russian depending on your preference. If you express your agreement, the interview will be tape-recorded. Your name, name of the university and program will be anonymous in all stages of the study and in all documents, including electronic files and the dissertation itself. All the collected data and recordings will be kept on the personal USB flash drive of the researcher, will be secured by the password and kept in the special secured box with a password. All written and printed documents, including consent forms, will be kept in the special secured box.

**TIME INVOLVEMENT:** Your participation will take between 30-45 minutes.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** The risks for participants associated with this study are very minimal. To reduce any potential risks of the study related to participants, the name of institution will be hidden. All names of participants in the documents will be changed and all personal data and interviews will be stored in a secured place. No information from interviews with the participants will be shared or reported to university teachers or administration. The time and place of the interview will be negotiated with every participant individually and will not intervene with the class time or studies, or with the final examination time. Therefore, participants will not lose their attendance scores at university and will have enough time for exam preparation and will not be revealed as participants.

The benefits which may reasonably be expected from this study are getting to share their stories in a unique for Kazakhstan research, and receiving new insights about the English language learning strategies as well as free coffee and snacks during the meetings. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your studies, status or class attendance.

**PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS:** If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

**Questions:** If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, please contact the Research Project Supervisor for this student work, Assistant Professor Anas Hajar at [anas.hajar@nu.edu.kz](mailto:anas.hajar@nu.edu.kz)

***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: \_\_\_\_\_

## ФОРМА ИНФОРМАЦИОННОГО СОГЛАСИЯ

Исследование Опыта Изучения и Стратегий Использования Английского Языка  
Казахстанскими Магистрантами в Англоязычном Университете Казахстана

**ОПИСАНИЕ:** Вы приглашены принять участие в исследовании о вашем опыте изучения английского языка и стратегий, которые вы используете для улучшения ваших навыков. Кроме того, исследование попытается выявить возможные проблемы при изучении английского языка у студентов магистратуры. Вам будет предложено написать короткое эссе о вашем опыте обучения, а затем принять участие в пост-интервью, которое содержит 10-15 вопросов на английском или русском языках на ваш выбор. Если вы выразите свое согласие, интервью будет записано на диктофон. Ваше имя, название университета и программы будут анонимными на всех этапах исследования и во всех документах, включая электронные файлы и саму диссертацию. Все собранные данные и записи будут храниться на персональном USB-накопителе исследователя, будут защищены паролем и храниться в специальном защищенном ящике с паролем. Все письменные и печатные документы, включая бланки согласия, будут храниться в специальном защищенном ящике.

**ВРЕМЯ УЧАСТИЯ:** Ваше участие потребует около 30-45 минут.

**РИСКИ И ПРЕИМУЩЕСТВА:** Риски для участников, связанные с этим исследованием, очень минимальны. Чтобы уменьшить любые потенциальные риски исследования, связанные с участниками, название учреждения будет скрыто. Все имена участников в документах будут изменены, а все личные данные и интервью будут храниться в защищенном месте. Никакая информация из интервью с участниками не будет сообщена преподавателям университета или администрации. Время и место проведения собеседования оговариваются с каждым участником индивидуально и не влияют на время занятий или на занятия, а также на время проведения экзаменов. Таким образом, участники не потеряют свои баллы посещаемости в университете и будут иметь достаточно времени для подготовки к экзаменам и не будут выявлены в качестве участников.

Преимущества, которые можно ожидать от этого исследования это возможность поделиться своими историями и опытом в уникальном для Казахстана исследовании и получить новые идеи о стратегиях изучения английского языка, а также бесплатный кофе и закуски во время встреч. Ваше решение участвовать или не участвовать в этом исследовании никаким образом не повлияет на: вашу учебу, статус или посещаемость занятий.

**ПРАВА УЧАСТНИКОВ:** Если Вы прочитали данную форму и решили принять участие в данном исследовании, Вы должны понимать, что Ваше участие является добровольным и что у Вас есть право отозвать свое согласие или прекратить участие в любое время без каких-либо потерь. В качестве альтернативы можно не участвовать в исследовании. Также Вы имеете право не отвечать на какие-либо вопросы. Результаты данного исследования могут быть представлены или опубликованы в научных или профессиональных целях.

**КОНТАКТНАЯ ИНФОРМАЦИЯ:**

**Вопросы:** Если у Вас есть вопросы, замечания или жалобы по поводу данного исследования, процедуры его проведения, рисков и преимуществ, Вы можете связаться с руководителем магистерского тезиса исследователя, используя следующие данные: Ассистент Профессор Анас Хаджар, [anas.hajar@nu.edu.kz](mailto:anas.hajar@nu.edu.kz)

**Независимые контакты:** Если Вы не удовлетворены проведением данного исследования, если у Вас возникли какие-либо проблемы, жалобы или вопросы, Вы можете связаться с Комитетом Исследований Высшей Школы Образования Назарбаев Университета, отправив письмо на электронный адрес [gse\\_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz](mailto:gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz).

Пожалуйста, подпишите данную форму, если Вы согласны участвовать в исследовании.

- Я внимательно изучил представленную информацию;
- Мне предоставили полную информацию о целях и процедуре исследования;
- Я понимаю, как будут использованы собранные данные, и что доступ к любой конфиденциальной информации будет иметь только исследователь;
- Я понимаю, что вправе в любой момент отказаться от участия в данном исследовании без объяснения причин;
- С полным осознанием всего вышеизложенного я согласен принять участие в исследовании по собственной воле.

Подпись: \_\_\_\_\_

Дата: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix D: Transcription Sample of Interview 10 (English)

**Researcher:** Good morning! Thanks again for coming! Thank you for your essay. So you're writing that you started learning English in Grade 5, like the majority. And it was your favorite subject. But you had to learn it on your own?

**Participant:** This actually has to do with the fact that I was born and raised in a small village, and, as you know, teachers there usually are not very competent and qualified. In addition, we had a young English teacher, she did not have much experience. At the beginning, everything was okay, but then she had a burnout, she wasn't that interested in teaching herself. And when a teacher loses an interest, they can't motivate their students.

**Researcher:** It's true. In your essay you are writing exactly the same, that you've always had interest in the English language, from your childhood...

**Participant:** Yes, I actually wanted to become a translator, not an English teacher. But when I enrolled in my previous university, I had already realized that I would not be a translator, as I do not like to read, I force myself to read.

**Researcher:** I see.

**Participant:** I joined the university back then not knowing my chosen major actually was in teaching, as I was told that I was applying for a translator. That is, I was simply deceived. But I don't regret it, because you can't teach in public schools with a translator's degree.

**Researcher:** It's true. Then, you mentioned in your essay the role of technology. You mentioned that you were watching YouTube 24/7, so I immediately got interested in what kind of videos you were watching?

**Participant:** I mostly watched YouTube bloggers. The most interesting thing for me in English was the pronunciation. Not the grammar or anything else. I really liked that the British accents are so different, so I intentionally watched British bloggers on YouTube. I also watched videos on photoshop design...

**Researcher:** That's very interesting! So, is it possible to state that the role of technology was big? It helped?

**Participant:** Yes, because without the Internet I wouldn't have improved English. After I finished university, I think I had something between the levels Intermediate and Pre-Intermediate. But this is not teachers' fault but the educational system's. But at the university we had to complete tasks that weren't really helping to improve English, so that always irritated me. Especially when I needed to learn something else, more important.

**Researcher:** You didn't go to the language courses?

**Participant:** Never in my life. Only when I was preparing for the UNT (United National Testing) in my senior year of high school, but we weren't learning English really, we were preparing for the test.

**Researcher:** Having had such a language learning experience, how would you evaluate your current level of English?

**Participant:** Before joining this EMI program, I had Advanced level. Then, I started to learn other foreign languages, but gave up on them due to a lack of energy or time, and when you don't practice a language, you forget it. Now I think my level of English is Upper-Intermediate. My reading skills are always different, depending on a difficulty of a text. I don't have any problems with my speaking skills, however, with scientific topics I might struggle.

**Researcher:** Good. Is there any event or person that encouraged or discouraged you to learn English?

**Participant:** Probably, my mom. She once came back home and said: "I saw my acquaintance with her son today, and the son was so cool, wearing sunglasses, looked like an American". So, that woman was bragging about her son being an English interpreter. And at that moment I also wanted to become an interpreter, or I wanted my job to be connected with



English. And then my mom always encouraged and supported me. After finishing university, I communicated with people in the online chat rooms. There was this online platform, it's not that popular now, but basically you enter a chat and start talking to people like you, who are also learning English; people from all over the world... And when you look at someone who speaks English fluently, it motivates you.

**Researcher:** I am interested in understanding the combination you had, so, you watched the videos, you used chat rooms...

**Participant:** In general, there were only those two things, yes. The chat rooms for speaking skills, and videos mostly for listening. My English instructor at the university told us that speaking and listening skills are interconnected.

**Researcher:** What are the reasons that made you join this academic program in English?

**Participant:** Actually, when I was applying for this program, I didn't really know what kind of a program this was, what it was about as it's a bit unclear to me. But I initially wanted to study in this university back in 2016, but I got in only after my second try. So, I just wanted to study here. I had a desire. And, in the future, I want to work in international schools like Haileybury, NIS, or maybe even abroad.

**Researcher:** I see. So, has the current program been up to your expectations so far?

**Participant:** There are problems. I have never liked educational system in Kazakhstan. We still have this factual learning approach, I think. We don't have problem solving approaches like in the USA, for example.

**Researcher:** How do you find this program's instructors' teaching methods?

**Participant:** It's quite unclear. There are both local and foreign instructors. There are instructors who don't even know their courses; there are those who have experience but also have drawbacks in their teaching methods, and I notice it as I am a teacher myself. But I can't really tell them anything. But there is insufficiency and disorganization within this program.

**Researcher:** I got it. Are there any challenges you are facing now? If yes, how are you dealing with them?

**Participant:** There are many. We have to read a lot here, and not only read but to also be able to analyze texts. You have to do it very fast. So, we are writing three final papers now, and of the course instructors did not even explain anything properly but is demanding things that he couldn't explain. Others have explained everything. I read very slowly, and we already have to finish writing the papers soon. In general, I struggle with reading articles, I don't have much time, and sometimes I don't even know what to read. Instructors don't provide us with the materials mostly. So, the most difficult – to find appropriate, relevant information.

**Researcher:** How do you cope with those difficulties?

**Participant:** I was interested in speed reading at some point in the past. I knew I would need it sometime in my life. I don't even know why but I am not really planning to go back to that. So, everything I am doing now is re-reading texts several times, which takes up a lot of time. As for the analysis – if a text is too difficult, I have to re-read it. So, this makes it all very slow.

**Researcher:** I see. When you encounter new academic words, is there anything you do to learn them? If yes, what? How do you learn them?

**Participant:** I don't really learn new words now, because when I initially had a strong interest, I just got a dictionary and started to memorize the words, which took up a lot of energy. Then, I realized why learn something I don't even use. So, I just translate new words, but don't try to learn them as there is no point. I just try to understand new words in a context, but if it doesn't help, then I translate the words, but I don't learn them. I don't even know if I am going to work on that.

**Researcher:** Comparing you today and when you just joined the program, do you think there are any differences?

**Participant:** This program is research-oriented, so I realized that I need to speak reasonably. That is, you cannot say “I think” or “maybe”, as you need to justify things; you need to use citations, and a source has to be reliable. Also, I always worked alone because it's more productive for me, but now we have to work in groups for collaboration, so I think I learned how to work in groups.

**Researcher:** Can you please describe your preparation process for the oral presentations in English that are part of this program?

**Participant:** We didn't make it on time the first time we presented in a small group. We didn't have consistency, and during the presentation we had a discrepancy. But it was the very first time, later, we learned how to do things. I personally don't experience any difficulties with speaking, and instructors give feedback right away; they tell us what not to do. So, now we have some experience.

**Researcher:** Can you please describe how you plan to write or are writing the final papers that are also part of this program?

**Participant:** I usually start with a search for appropriate literature, and also I compose a mind map in my head, I never write it out because I can't. Then, I work on this mind map a few times. Later, I start writing, but in the process of writing I am also fixing it several times. So, firstly – looking for the materials; then – reading them, and then – composing a mind map. I have never had to write so much before. I don't like reading and writing.

**Researcher:** We are almost finishing. Are you motivated to enhance your English proficiency at this point? If yes, what are your current language learning goals and how do you plan to achieve them (i.e., strategies to achieve these goals)?

**Participant:** I don't have any motivation to improve English now. I just need to pass the courses in this program. I don't have any problems with English now, and it's like my limit, and I don't want to jump above it.

**Researcher:** As for your language goals, in your essay you wrote "Academic English is a challenge, as for dealing with this challenge, I believe reading articles is useful"...

**Participant:** Academic English – one just needs to read academic texts, science texts maybe. That's it. I learn things on my own, I self-teach. I went to the Writing Center on campus, but I didn't like it, and it takes a lot of time. Maybe, in the future if I have problems, I will try online courses like "Coursera". But now it's not a priority.

**Researcher:** We covered everything. Is there anything else you would like to add? Thank you very much!

**Participant:** I think I talked about everything. Will be waiting for the results of your work. Thank you!

**Образец транскрипции интервью 10 (Оригинал)**

**Исследователь:** Еще раз доброе утро! Спасибо, что пришли! Спасибо еще раз за эссе.

Вы пишете, что вы начали изучать английский в 5 классе, как и многие. И это был ваш любимый предмет, но вам приходилось самому изучать?

**Участник:** Это скорее всего связано с тем, что я родился и вырос в маленьком поселке, и там, как вы понимаете, преподаватели бывают не совсем компетентны и квалифицированы. К тому же, у нас была молодая преподавательница, у нее не хватало опыта. В начале было нормально, но потом у нее произошел burnout, ей самой не интересно было преподавать. И когда преподавателю самому неинтересно, он не может мотивировать учеников.

**Исследователь:** Это правда. Вы как раз в эссе пишете, что интерес к английскому у вас всегда был с детства...

**Участник:** Да, вообще я хотел стать не преподавателем английского, а переводчиком. Но когда я поступил в университет, я уже понял, что из меня переводчик не выйдет, а я читать не люблю, я заставляю себя читать.

**Исследователь:** Понятно.

**Участник:** Я поступил на преподавателя, не зная этого, мне сказали, что я поступаю на переводчика и, так сказать, просто обманули. Но я об этом не жалею, потому что с дипломом переводчика нельзя преподавать в государственных школах.

**Исследователь:** Это правда. Дальше вы пишете про role of technology, так скажем. И вы пишете, что вы смотрели YouTube 24 часа, сразу интересно стало, что вы смотрели, какие видео?

**Участник:** Я в основном смотрел блоггеров, мне было интересно вообще, самое интересное в английском языке — это произношение было. Не грамматика, и еще что-то там, мне очень нравились британские акценты разные, и целенаправленно я смотрел блоггеров-британцев. Также, я смотрел про дизайн, как там делать на фотошопе что-то.

**Исследователь:** Интересно очень! А можно ли вот сказать, что роль технологий поспособствовала?

**Участник:** Да, потому что без интернета я бы не смог подтянуть английский, потому что после окончания университета у меня был где-то между intermediate и pre-intermediate. Но здесь как бы не вина преподавателей, а вина системы образования. Но в университете там делаешь сам все, дают задания, но эти задания не всегда связаны с изучением английского и меня это немного раздражало - когда мне нужно учить что-то важное.

**Исследователь:** На курсы, к репетиторам вы не ходили?

**Участник:** В жизни никуда не ходил. Только когда к ЕНТ готовился, в 11 классе, но мы не изучали английский особо, а готовились к тесту.

**Исследователь:** Пройдя такой путь, на сегодняшний день, как вы оцениваете свой уровень английского языка?

**Участник:** До поступления сюда у меня был advanced, потом, я начинал изучать другие языки, но забрасывал из-за нехватки времени или нехватки энергии, и когда не практикуешь язык-забывается. Сейчас наверное у меня upper-intermediate. Reading у меня всегда колеблется, несмотря на сложность текста. Со спикингом у меня проблем нет, но с научными темами я буду наверное struggle.

**Исследователь:** Это здорово. А есть ли в вашей жизни какой-то человек, который поощрял ваше изучение английского, либо наоборот, или было ли событие какое-нибудь в вашей жизни...

**Участник:** Скорее всего, моя мама. Однажды она пришла домой и говорит, знаешь, я сегодня встретила знакомую женщину с сыном, в очках, такой крутой, и он выглядит как американец, и та женщина типа хвасталась, что он переводчик. И вот, в этот момент я тоже сильно захотел стать переводчиком, хотел, чтобы профессия была связана с английским языком. И потом мама меня подбадривала. Потом, после окончания университета, я общался с людьми в internet chat rooms, была такая программа, сейчас она уже неактуальна, - там заходишь в room и там такие же люди, которые изучают английский, с разных стран мира; и когда смотришь как кто-то может свободно говорить на английском, тебя это мотивирует тоже.

**Исследователь:** Мне интересно понять комплекс какой у вас был - видео, чаты...

**Участник:** В основном, вот эти 2 вещи. То есть, чат - это для speaking skills, а видео больше для listening. У меня преподава в универе говорила, что speaking & listening связаны.

**Исследователь:** Каковы причины, которые замотивировали вас поступить на эту программу на английском языке?

**Участник:** Вообще когда я поступал сюда, я понятия не имел на кого я поступаю, потому что программа она немного непонятная. А желание сюда поступить появилось еще в 2016 году, так что, я поступил сюда только со второго раза. Мотивация скорее всего... тупо желание. Я вообще в будущем хотел бы поработать в international schools типа Haileybury, NIS, может быть даже за границей.

**Исследователь:** Понятно. Ну вот, соответствует ли программа вашим ожиданиям?

**Участник:** Тут есть кое-какие проблемы. Я всегда не любил систему образования в Казахстане. У нас все еще существует factual learning, что ли. У нас нет problem solving, как, например, в США.

**Исследователь:** Как вам методика преподавания инструкторов на этой программе?

**Участник:** Методика непонятная. Есть местные, есть иностранные преподады. Есть преподады, которые вообще не знают своего предмета; есть те, у кого есть опыт, но все-таки в методике есть недоработки - я это замечаю как преподаватель. Но я конечно же не могу им этого сказать. Есть неэффективность. Неорганизованность есть.

**Исследователь:** Я вас поняла. Есть ли какие-либо проблемы, с которыми вы сейчас сталкиваетесь?

**Участник:** Очень много. Здесь надо очень много читать, и не просто читать, а уметь анализировать тексты. И надо это делать очень быстро. Письмо - final paper, вот мы сейчас пишем, у нас сейчас 3 final papers, 1 из них - преподаватель толком ничего не объяснял и он требует того, что он не смог дать нам! Остальные два - преподаватели нормально все объяснили. Я читаю очень медленно, надо уже заканчивать пейперы. В основном, трудность в чтении - не хватает времени, и иногда не знаешь что читать. Преподады ведь не дают готовый материал. И самое сложное - найти что читать, relevant information.

**Исследователь:** А как вы справляетесь с этими проблемами или планируете справляться?

**Участник:** Я когда-то интересовался speed reading, я знал, что мне когда-то это пригодится в жизни, я также тренировался, но сейчас все-таки... Я даже не знаю с чем это связано, но в ближайшем будущем я не собираюсь возвращаться к этому. Все, что я делаю - я перечитываю по несколько раз, это занимает очень много времени. А насчет анализа - если текст сложный, то мне надо обязательно перечитывать. И это замедляет процесс всего.

**Исследователь:** Понятно. А например если вы встречаете новые слова, как вы их запоминаете?



**Участник:** Я слова уже не запоминаю, потому что в начале когда был сильный интерес, я взял словарь и тупо начал учить все слова, и на это у меня уходило очень много энергии, и потом я понял - зачем учить то, что я не использую. Новые слова я перевожу, но не стараюсь запоминать, потому что смысла нет их учить. Просто из контекста стараюсь понять что слова означают, но если так не идет, то перевожу, но не запоминаю. Не знаю, буду ли развивать это сейчас.

**Исследователь:** Сравнивая вас когда вы только поступили на эту программу и сейчас – есть ли какие-нибудь изменения, которые вы заметили?

**Участник:** У нас программа research-oriented, и сейчас я понял, что надо уметь говорить обоснованно. То есть, ты не можешь сказать "I think", "maybe", нужно обосновывать, citations, a source has to be reliable, and also, I always worked alone because it's more productive for me, but now we have to work in groups for collaboration, so I think I learned how to work in groups.

**Исследователь:** Как раз работа в команде - как у вас проходит подготовка к speaking assignments?

**Участник:** В первый раз, мы не справились с time management, мы не смогли сжать информацию, у нас не было consistency, и прямо во время презентации у нас была нестыковка. Это был самый первый опыт, потом мы уже научились как все делать. Лично я не испытываю никаких трудностей в speaking, преподаватели сразу дают feedback, говорят что лучше не делать. Сейчас уже есть более-менее опыт.

**Исследователь:** Насчет written assignments - как там подготовка проходит?

**Участник:** Я обычно начинаю с поиска материала подходящих, потом в уме делаю mind map, никогда не делаю письменно, потому что не получается. Потом этот mind map переделывается несколько раз. И потом я начинаю писать, и в процессе уже переделываю несколько раз. Но сначала вот поиск материалов, чтение и mind map.

Раньше мне никогда не приходилось так много писать. Писать и читать я не очень люблю.

**Исследователь:** Мы почти заканчиваем. Есть ли у вас сейчас мотивация улучшить английский?

**Участник:** Сейчас вообще у меня нет мотивации улучшить английский, мне просто надо пройти курсы на этой программе, с английским сейчас у меня нет проблем. Это как бы мой предел, и дальше я не хочу перепрыгивать.

**Исследователь:** Касательно языковых целей, в эссе вы пишете “Academic English is a challenge, as for dealing with this challenge, I believe reading articles is useful”.

**Участник:** Именно Academic English - тут просто читать академические тексты, science texts maybe. И все. Я самоучка, я ходил в Writing Center, но мне не понравилось, это много времени занимает. Возможно, если в будущем будут проблемы, то я попробую на coursera проходить курсы. Сейчас это не в приоритете.

**Исследователь:** В принципе, мы все покрыли. Если только у вас есть что добавить? Большой рахмет!

**Участник:** Возможно, я все рассказал. Будем ждать результаты вашей работы. Спасибо!