Secondary English language teaching in Kazakhstan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to the educational standards in Kazakhstan, by the end of secondary school students should achieve a level of English equivalent to B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). It is officially recognised, though, that current English outcomes for secondary English in the country are not meeting this target. To provide some insight into why this is the case, the British Council commissioned this analysis of secondary English teaching in Kazakhstan.

The study drew on deskwork research into Kazakhstan's education and language policy and the results of previous projects for teachers of English in the country were also reviewed. Additionally, over 2,700 teachers completed surveys, with additional evidence coming from observations of lessons and meetings with a range of stakeholders.

While the analysis highlighted a range of educational policies and reforms that are supportive of English language teaching in Kazakhstan, several factors that may limit secondary English outcomes in the country were also identified. These include:

- the optional nature of English as a subject in secondary school graduation and university admission tests and the lack of a spoken component in these tests
- modest levels of English language competence among secondary English teachers, especially in relation to speaking skills
- a mechanism for assessing teacher standards that does not take into account (a) teachers' actual classroom performance or (b) their levels of speaking and listening in English
- English lessons that prioritise students' knowledge of language systems rather than the development of their communicative skills
- modest pedagogical competence among teachers, particularly in relation to teaching language skills, assessment, differentiation, 21st-Century skills, corrective feedback and questioning
- professional development interventions that do not effectively target key pedagogical competences required by secondary teachers of English
- approaches to professional development (reinforced by Ministry accreditation criteria) that prioritise training courses delivered by local trainers and limit the provision of alternative models which are less transmissive
- inconsistent access in schools to technologies, including stable internet connections, that can support secondary English teaching.

In response to these findings, the report makes recommendations for improving several areas of secondary English in Kazakhstan, including English testing, English teachers' linguistic and pedagogical competences, teacher appraisal criteria, pre-service teacher education, teacher professional development and resources for teaching. It is also suggested that a review of English teaching at primary level be undertaken given its implications for secondary level English outcomes

1 | INTRODUCTION

The British Council commissioned this study in order to (a) provide insight into English language teaching (ELT) in secondary education in Kazakhstan and (b) generate actionable recommendations for enhancing the quality of secondary ELT teaching and learning. The broader context for the research presented here is first outlined, followed by details of how the study was conducted. The core of the report presents the research results and, based on these, recommendations are made for strengthening secondary ELT in Kazakhstan and for further research into this area of education. The University of Leicester conducted the research and produced an initial analysis. Following delays caused by COVID and personnel changes at Leicester, the British Council then commissioned Simon Borg[1] to revise and finalise the report.

2 | KAZAKHSTAN

2.1. Overview

Kazakhstan (officially, the Republic of Kazakhstan) is located in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, with an area (ranked ninth in the world) of approximately 2,724,900 square kilometres[2]. It borders Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan to the south; Russia to the north; Russia and the Caspian Sea to the west; and China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region to the east. The population of Kazakhstan is 19.6 million (2021)[3] and its capital city is Astana. The official languages are Kazakh and Russian and GDP per capita is US$ 10,041.5[4]. In 2021, the unemployment rate in Kazakhstan was just under five percent[5]. Kazakhstan's vision for development is defined in the Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy, which was launched in 2012. The overall aim of the strategy is to make Kazakhstan one of the top 30 developed countries by 2050.

2.2. Digital Environment

According to Digital 2022's report on Kazakhstan[6], the country's digital landscape is defined as follows:

• 16.4 million internet users
• 13.8 million social media users, of which 2.3 million use Facebook, 7.26 million TikTok and 11.75 million Instagram
• Median mobile internet connection speed via cellular networks: 18.82 Mbps

- Median fixed internet connection speed: 35.26 Mbps (94/182 countries)[7].

A key national initiative from 2020 has been the Digital Education project (OECD, 2021), which aims to train over three million digital specialists across all economic sectors by 2030.

2.3. Education System

Education in Kazakhstan is centralised (OECD, 2018). It is regulated nationally by the Ministry of Education and Science (recently divided into two - the Ministry of Enlightenment and the Ministry of Higher Education) and delivered locally by the educational authorities in each oblast (administrative region). The education system is divided into Pre-Primary, Primary (Grades 1-4), and Lower Secondary (Grades 5-9), after which two routes are available to students: General Upper Secondary (Grades 10-11) or Vocational and Technical Education (Grades 10-12). Various forms of post-secondary education are also available: further Vocational and Technical (V&T) Education, Applied Bachelor's degrees and Bachelor's degrees. For 2021, the breakdown of student numbers is shown in Figure 1 (general education includes grades 1-11 – primary, lower secondary and upper secondary).

Pre-Primary	922.400
General Education	3.597.159
V&T Education	494.042
Higher Education	575.511
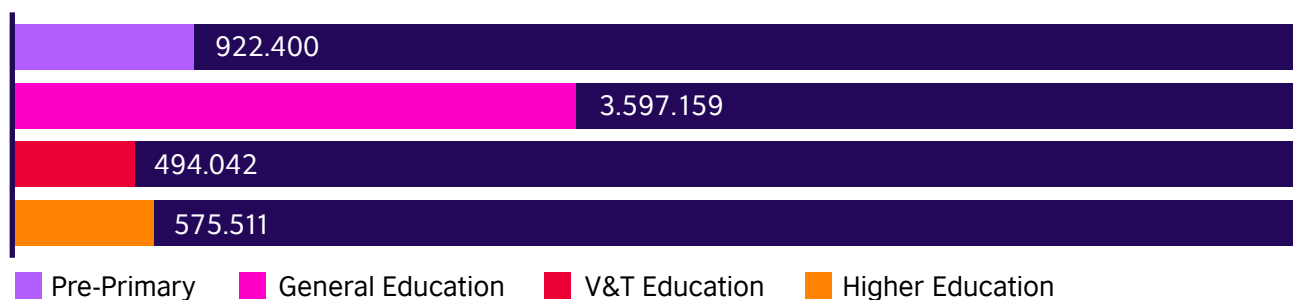
Figure 1: Student population in Kazakhstan – 2021[8].

Education spending in 2019 was 2.9% of gross domestic product[9] (for comparison, the EU average for 2020 was 5%[10] and that for OECD countries in 2019 was 4.9%[11]). Enrolment in higher education is around 50% (OECD, 2018). With specific reference to secondary education, according to the Bureau of National Statistics[12], in the 2021-22 academic year there were 7,550 state secondary schools and 369,696 teachers. Official figures from September 2022 show that there were 32,717 secondary school teachers of English.

Kazakhstan participates in PISA testing and results from 2018 were that 'students in Kazakhstan scored lower than the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science'[13]. Kazakhstan was also included in an analysis of teaching practices across

Eastern Europe and Central Asia which concluded that teachers 'continue to rely heavily on traditional pedagogy, such as lecturing to students and asking them to memorise information' (OECD/UNICEF, 2021, p.69).

2.4. Educational Reforms

Modernising the education system is one objective of the 2050 Strategy and in recent years the government of Kazakhstan has embarked on an extensive programme of education reform. An OECD analysis (OECD, 2018) has highlighted the following initiatives:

- Introduction of the "0+11" model, with a transition to a 12-year model of compulsory schooling (2016)
- State Programme for Education and Science Development (2016-2019)
- Road to School (2010)
- Dual training system in Vocational Education and Training (VET) (2012),
- Free Vocational Education for All (2017)
- Bolashak scholarship programme (1993)
- Update of the State Compulsory Standard (SCS) of Primary Education and SCS for General and Secondary Education (2017)
- Greater emphasis on English as a foreign language and language of instruction in subjects related to science, technology and engineering (see 2.7 below).

The 'Evolution of key education policy priorities (2008-19)' summarised in OECD's 2019 educational outlook for Kazakhstan (OECD, 2019) provides further insight into the range of recent initiatives undertaken by the country.

2.5. Pre-Service Teacher Education

An OECD summary of pathways to teaching in Kazakhstan is included in the appendix to this report.

According to current legislation[14], a Bachelor's degree in Kazakhstan consists of at least 240 academic credits. Teachers graduate from pedagogical colleges and universities. There is no centralised pre-service teacher education curriculum and each institution defines its own (though accredited programmes must be approved by the relevant Ministry). OECD's (2020) analysis of initial teacher education in Kazakhstan noted that the accreditation of programmes is voluntary and there is a need to develop a coherent approach to accreditation that applies to all providers

and that can ensure that graduates meet specific standards for beginning teachers.

For English teachers, programmes often follow textbooks written by local or Russian experts and typically include courses on the following topics:

• Methods and approaches in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)
• Psychology of foreign language learning
• Methods of teaching language systems (pronunciation, grammar and lexis)
• Methods of teaching receptive skills (listening and reading)
• Methods of teaching productive skills (speaking and writing)
• Planning and organization of the teaching process.

For prospective primary school teachers of English, there is also a compulsory course which covers the psychology of young learners, approaches to teaching foreign languages to young learners and methods of teaching oral and written skills.

Prospective teachers are required to complete a professional internship, which is organised according to the specifics of their specialisation (i.e. English language teaching).

All university applicants must pass the Unified National Test (UNT). This includes four compulsory subjects: Maths, History of Kazakhstan, Kazakh or Russian as a first language, Kazakh or Russian as a second language. Additionally, students take a fifth subject which they choose or which is required by their specialization. In the case of prospective teachers of English, the fifth subject is English and the UNT test for this subject consists of multiple choice questions that focus largely on grammar and vocabulary and, to a lesser extent, reading comprehension.

Alongside those courses which are discipline-specific, undergraduate programmes also address a range of generic skills which are in demand by the labour market. These include:

• Solving complex problems
• Critical thinking
• Creativity
• People management
• Interactions with others
• Emotional intelligence
• Decision making
• Service orientation

- Negotiation skills
- Cognitive flexibility.

Though ORLEU (see 2.6) are not responsible for pre-service teacher education, they also support prospective teachers through a training course for students in their 3rd and 4th years of study across all subject specialisations. On this course, students receive 20 hours of offline training plus 20 hours of self-study on topics such as criteria-based assessment and classroom management.

2.6. Teacher Professional Development

OECD (2018) identified teacher status[15] as an area for development in Kazakhstan. Since then, various steps have been taken to address this, most notably the 2020 Law on the Teacher's Status. Teacher standards have also been further developed and these now include five categories: Teacher, Teacher-moderator, Teacher-expert, Teacher-researcher and Teacher-master. To upgrade their status, teachers take the National Qualification Test (NQT)[16], which has subject-specific versions though all tests follow a common format.

The professional development of teachers is carried out by various organisations (including the British Council in collaboration with local partners) but the leading role belongs to the National Centre for Professional Development, known as ORLEU. They have about 1,000 employees and are represented in all regions. Courses typically last 80 hours. For face-to-face courses, 70 hours are devoted to practical seminars, six hours to on-site practical classes and four hours to assessment. For online training, 36 hours are devoted to webinars, 40 hours to self-study work and four hours to assessment.

To support the implementation of Kazakhstan's trilingual policy (see 2.7 below) and upgraded curriculum, the oblast education departments have, through Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools Centres of Excellence[17], been running the following in-service training programmes:

- four-week refresher/upgrade curriculum training courses for all teachers in contemporary teaching methods, assessment methods, such as formative assessment, and application of ICT within their specific subjects
- four-week training courses for all Grade 1 and Grade 2 English teachers
- various Cambridge qualifications, courses, and programmes (see 2.7.1 below)
- nine-month or three-month English courses for STEM teachers, depending on their current level of English.

In 2021, it was decreed that, from 2023, teachers must engage in MOE-accredited professional development every three years (at present it is every five years)[18]. The accreditation criteria, though, are focused on training courses, which must provide 80 hours of work and be delivered by ORLEU trainers. For these reasons, the British Council interventions described in 2.7.2 below are not officially recognised.

2.7. Language Education

Since the early 2000s, Kazakhstan language policy has been one of trilingualism, with a focus on developing competence among the population in Kazakh (the state language), Russian (for inter-ethnic communication) and English (the language of the global economy). According to Moldagazinova (2019, p.4), key activities in the 2015-2020 Roadmap of Trilingual Education Development were:

- plan for at least 20 percent of disciplines to be taught in the second language, at least 30 percent in English
- develop 40 English-language curricula and textbooks for universities
- develop and implement a mechanism that would oblige English-speaking alumni of the "Bolashak" scholarship program to teach at educational centers (for no less than 2 academic hours per week) without taking them away from their primary place of employment
- improve current curricula and develop new ones for trilingual education
- retrain university professors to work in a trilingual context (with the support of grant funding)
- include summer language schools in the curricula of 3rd and 4th-year university students.

An analysis of the impact of this policy is beyond the scope of this report, but various challenges it has faced have been noted and it has also been suggested that more recent policy indicates that bilingualism will be the priority moving forward (Karabassova, 2020).

The trilingual policy also (see Karabassova, 2018) expects subject teachers to apply content and integrated language learning (CLIL) – that is, to develop students' subject knowledge and L1, L2, or L3 language proficiency simultaneously. A range of broader initiatives that were taking place in Kazakhstan to support the trilingual education policy were noted in the English for Success scoping report (University of Leicester, 2019), including:

- The teaching of English from Grade 1 in schools
- The teaching of STEM subjects (Biology, Chemistry, Physics and ICT) in Grades 10 and 11 through the medium of English from 2019
- Using more contemporary methods of teaching, learning and assessment
- Piloting the development of technical language in STEM through the medium of English in some schools
- Teaching STEM pre-service teachers through the medium of English (for significant parts of the course)
- Trilingual teaching and learning on university courses
- All university students learning ICT through the medium of English
- All students [post-secondary] studying professional English
- Developing the pedagogical background of university lecturers
- Developing the English skills of all university staff to support the trilingual policy
- PhDs to be done through the medium of a foreign language with a foreign core supervisor.

Some of these reforms have since been further modified; for example, according to Karabassova (2018), teaching STEM subjects through English was not made compulsory and schools were allowed to decide which subjects to teach through English depending on their capacity.

The teaching and learning of English language was introduced into Grade 1 in 2013, followed by Grade 2 in 2017.

The curriculum for English language encourages the equal development of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills along with grammar and vocabulary. It also promotes the implementation of more contemporary learning and teaching approaches and formative assessment.

The State Compulsory Education Standards (SCES) define the English language proficiency targets expected at different levels of education. According to SCES 2020-21[19] 'upon completion of primary school education, students must reach the language level A1 on the CEFR. Upon completion of basic secondary education, students should have level B1. Upon completion of secondary education, students should reach the level B2' (p. 84 – translated from the original).

The National Academy for Education oversees the development of the national graduation tests that students complete at the end of Grade 11. Kazakh, Russian and Mathematics are compulsory subjects while English is optional. The English test

previously included listening, use of English, and reading. It has been recently updated and now includes two parts - reading and writing.

Students wishing to go to university also have to complete the University Entrance Test (UNT), where the English component (which tests reading and grammar) is in most cases also optional.

2.7.1. English Language Teaching Resources and Training

Two international sources of ELT resources and training that are widely used by teachers of English in Kazakhstan are described here.

British Council Resources
The British Council provides free online resources that English teachers can access to improve their personal level of English and their teaching skills. Two platforms are provided:

Learn English (https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org), which includes live online courses, online self-study courses, personal tutoring, and IELTS preparation courses.

Teach English (www.britishcouncil.org/teach-english), which includes professional development resources, including training materials, classroom resources, and networking opportunities for teachers of English at different stages of their careers.

Cambridge English Qualifications
Cambridge English (https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/teaching-english) provides teaching qualifications and courses to suit teachers at all career stages. Its teacher development programmes are tailored to meet local requirements and are designed to develop teachers' classroom skills, improve their level of English, and build teacher training capacity. The following qualifications and associated courses are offered:

• Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT): a series of modular teaching qualifications which test teachers' knowledge in specific areas of English language teaching.
• CELT-P: designed to help primary school teachers teach English effectively
• CELT-S: designed specifically to help secondary school teachers teach English effectively
• Language for Teaching: the three levels of Language for Teaching develop teachers' general English level, as well as providing them with the professional language they need

- Certificate in EMI Skills: a short course which supports internationalisation of higher education institutions by building the confidence of teaching staff who are teaching their subjects in English
- Train the Trainer: a practical, intensive course which develops trainers' skills in delivering programmes and supporting, mentoring, and delivering feedback to teachers.

2.7.2. Professional Development for Teachers of English in Kazakhstan

The British Council in Kazakhstan has delivered (typically through local partnerships) a number of recent professional development initiatives for secondary school teachers of English (as well as for STEM teachers). Key findings from evaluations of these projects are summarised here.

English for Atyrau (Vector STEM Partnership, 2018) aimed

> to build the pedagogical expertise of every English language and STEM teacher and lecturer in Atyrau State schools and Atyrau State University (ASU) to enable them to more effectively develop the English language, STEM and 21st-Century skills of all students in the oblast, thus supporting the Government of Kazakhstan's tri-lingual education reform programme and ensuring the creation of the highly-skilled future workforce required by employers in the oblast (p. 1).

The evaluation of the project concluded that it had impacted positively on the competences of the trainers and participating teachers. In particular it was noted that

> the outcomes of the implementation in the teachers' classrooms were significant. The teachers, school principals, methodologists and students were reporting improvements in student motivation, interest, confidence, achievement and English language speaking listening, reading and writing skills. The STEM students were also developing their terminology, knowledge and understanding of STEM through the medium of English. (p.17)

A second project was English for Success, which was delivered in Mangystau. This was

> a two-year project aiming to enhance the pedagogical competences of 90 English and 90 STEM teachers working in secondary and post-secondary education in the Mangystau region of Kazakhstan. Improving STEM teachers' ability to teach through the medium of English was another goal. (Borg, 2020, p. 5)

Key findings from the project evaluation were:

- a total of 112 teachers completed the full two years of the project
- teachers, trainers, school directors and educational authorities held very positive views about the project and its impact on STEM and English teaching
- almost 98% of the STEM survey respondents agreed that the project had enabled them to use questions more effectively, implement active learning approaches, design teaching resources and become more reflective
- all respondents to the English teacher survey agreed that, as a result of the project, their students had become more motivated, lessons had become more interactive, and they themselves as teachers had become more reflective, confident in their use of technology and able to use active teaching techniques.

One of the challenges encountered during the project was that STEM teachers' levels of English were lower than expected.

More recently, teachers of English from Kazakhstan have been involved in the British Council's Future English Online Teacher Community (OTC), which is an online professional development platform being delivered in six countries in Wider Europe. The platform provides access to professional development through self-access learning modules, as well as space for teacher interaction and peer learning through live sessions, discussion forums and webinars. In 2021-22, a total of 2,023 teachers from Kazakhstan (in two cohorts, each lasting 10 weeks) took part in professional development through the OTC.

Quantitative analyses were completed by the British Council at the end of each cohort. For Cohort 1, 46% of 809 participating teachers from Kazakhstan completed an exit survey. In the survey there were eight questions which focused on the extent to which the OTC functioned effectively as a community of practice (for example, 'I learned from other teachers' ideas and experience shared on the OTC platform'). For Cohort 1, the average level of agreement with these statements by teachers from Kazakhstan was at least 81%. Also, 90% of the teachers agreed they had acquired new knowledge and/or skills from the programme. Teachers were also asked if they had applied ideas learned during the OTC to their own classrooms and 97% said they had. The results of the exit survey with the Cohort 2 group from Kazakhstan (which 31% of 1,214 participants completed) were similarly positive.

A qualitative study of the impact of the OTC across five participating countries was also completed at the end of the 2021-22 school year (Borg, 2022). For Kazakhstan, eleven teachers took part in individual interviews or submitted written texts in which they reflected on the OTC. These teachers felt that participating in the online programme was a positive experience. They appreciated the new teaching ideas they obtained and the access they were given to UK trainers. The teachers highlighted various ways in which the OTC had promoted positive changes in their own English (including their confidence to speak the language) as well as in their theoretical and practical knowledge of teaching methods. One aspect of the OTC that teachers particularly valued was receiving advice and suggestions from colleagues. The Kazakhstani teachers all felt that the OTC had led to changes in their teaching, such as the introduction of more interactive and motivating classroom activities. The teachers did not experience significant challenges during the programme; finding time was an issue for some, while others suggested that more practical illustrations of teaching techniques be provided along with further opportunities for teachers to develop their teaching skills.

2.7.3. Observations of Teaching

Additional insight into the teaching of English in Kazakhstan comes from lesson observations that were conducted in Atyrau and Mangystau before and during the first two professional development projects noted above. Nine English and STEM classes were observed in each region (one Grade 4, two Grade 8, and six Grade 9) and the following conclusions were reached.

English language levels of teachers
The English language competence of teachers observed was extremely variable, with the primary areas for development being pronunciation and fluency.

Lesson focus
During the majority of observed lessons, teachers attempted to develop or practise multiple skills, particularly speaking, writing, and reading, with some listening.

Lesson structure
Most teachers observed attempted to implement a three-stage lesson model involving starter, core activities, and plenary. The starter involved use of either video, audio, or photographs related to the topic of the lesson to stimulate interest. Some teachers involved the students in questions or an activity relating to what they had learned during the previous lesson in order to recap. Core activities in many cases were a series of activities relating to the topic, with many involving active learning activities designed

to consolidate textbook content and develop English language skills. Some activities were developed by the teacher, while others were adapted or further developed from the textbook. Plenary sessions were generally a summary of the lesson.

Classroom management
Some teachers observed organised students into small groups of four to six, while others organised students into groups at the start of the lesson or new groups between activities. The students worked very cooperatively and collaboratively in their groups. Most teachers did not select students or pairs to give answers to questions; they tended to take shouted-out answers or call on those students with hands raised.

Facilitating learning
Many of the teachers observed did not facilitate learning. Instead they allocated students an activity and ensured that it was completed. They did not challenge learning through questions or support learners who required additional help. In addition, the concept of taking students to higher levels of thinking using probing or challenging questions was largely absent during observed lessons.

Differentiation
In all observed classrooms all students, irrespective of ability or motivation, were involved in the same activities, with no planning for differentiation via different tasks or organising groups to allow some students to have more teacher or peer support.

Types of teaching activities
A range of active teaching and learning activities were observed, most designed to develop the listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills of students in parallel with their grammar and vocabulary. Strategies observed included:

- small-group discussions
- matching pairs of words
- sequencing and classifying words
- brainstorming
- cloze procedure
- role play
- poster presentations
- graphic organisers
- games
- songs.

Developing understanding and thinking

During many of the observed lessons, teachers used a series of low level cognitive activities, leading to modest levels of student understanding. The teachers did not take student understanding to progressively higher levels via structured questions to clarify, consolidate, probe, challenge, or extend. Students often merely completed an activity for which the teacher obtained a correct answer.

Developing English language skills

In most lessons speaking was practised during the group activities and discussions when students were asked to give answers to questions/tasks, read texts aloud, or when the group or individuals presented outcomes of an activity. During these activities teachers sometimes corrected pronunciation, usually during presentations from the front of the room, but occasionally when individuals were giving answers to questions or tasks.

Writing skills were practised by answering questions or completing short tasks, but no extended writing activities were observed. None of the teachers provided a writing frame, such as a list of questions or points to address, and none involved students in pre-writing, writing, and post-writing tasks to further develop their skills.

Reading practice normally involved reading the textbook or other texts aloud, or completing an activity related to the text in the textbook. No lessons were observed where the teachers used pre-reading, reading, and post-reading tasks.

Listening skills were generally practised by listening to a stimulus video, audio recording, or the teacher reading a text from the textbook. None of these examples involved students in any pre-listening or post-listening activities.

During most of the observed lessons, pronunciation was only superficially developed when students were reading aloud, answering questions, or reporting the outcomes of a task. In these instances, correction was provided by the teacher, and students were not asked to repeat or practise using the correct version. Reading aloud with no preparation was challenging for most students and, as a result, they often made errors.

Vocabulary was typically developed through matching activities, where students matched words/pictures with their definition/meaning. Some teachers also assessed the vocabulary of students by selecting words and asking them to describe the meaning.

Developing 21st-century skills

Only one teacher observed was developing the collaborative skills of their students by

suggesting rules for working in groups. None of the observations included the use of rubrics to help students understand the skills they were developing, and self-/peer assess them.

Teacher's use of materials

The teachers observed tended to use PowerPoint to help structure their lessons, and many used it effectively by creating their resources for matching pairs, sequencing, discussion activities, and role-play activities. Teachers also accessed resources from websites and made good use of electronic quizzes for assessing learning at the end of lessons. Teachers were using textbooks approved by the Ministry, and accompanying activity sheets and audio/visual media.

Student interaction

When students were arranged in small groups of four, they generally managed their teamwork well. However, when not arranged appropriately, they found it more challenging to collaborate. In most classrooms, students seemed highly motivated, engaged in learning, and cooperative.

In addition to the baseline observations reported above, during the English for Success: Mangystau project classroom observations (13) of English and STEM teachers were conducted as part of the mid-point evaluation (The Consultants-E, 2019). Across both groups of teachers, it was found that:

- lesson planning was effective overall, although in some cases there was less of a clear link between activities within the lesson
- within the area of lesson planning, one of the less effective areas was encouraging learners to engage in deeper levels of thinking
- giving instructions, classroom management, pacing, and providing opportunities for learners to work collaboratively were identified as strengths in the lessons observed
- assessment of learning, though, was an area of teaching which could be improved.

Specifically for the English teachers, the results of the lesson observations were:

- teachers and learners spoke English most of the time
- most teachers effectively supported their learners with English during the classes when needed
- areas for development in the English lessons were error correction by teachers and providing a balance of skills and language work
- in some cases, too, lessons were a series of (sometimes unrelated) activities rather than a coherent whole.

For the observation results summarised here, it must be acknowledged that the samples were small and not necessarily representative of wider trends in secondary ELT in Kazakhstan. Nonetheless, insights into what happens in actual classrooms are an important source of evidence in studies of this kind.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Aims

The motivation for this study was the general concern among educational authorities in Kazakhstan that achievement in English among school leavers was modest. The research conducted here sought to provide insights into this issue and to generate actionable recommendations for addressing it.

More specifically, the study aimed to:

- understand and describe national policies that impact (positively or negatively) on English language teaching in the country
- assess the effectiveness of current secondary English teaching practices
- identify secondary school teachers' professional development needs
- identify factors that may contribute to low levels of English language proficiency among school leavers.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Various forms of data were collected by the University of Leicester team, supported by the British Council in Kazakhstan, between January and March 2021.

3.2.1. Teacher Self-Assessments

Teachers were asked to complete a modified version of the British Council's Self-Assessment Tool (SAT) (see Borg & Edmett, 2019 for details of this instrument). It asks teachers to rate their competence in nine areas of professional practice: planning lessons and courses; managing the lesson; assessing learning; knowing the subject; managing resources; integrating ICT; understanding learners; promoting 21st-century skills; and using inclusive practices. These areas are drawn from the British Council CPD Framework for Teachers[20] and reflect competences teachers of English should possess in order to be effective. In addition to the quantitative self-assessments,

teachers answered open-ended questions about each professional practice (these were not part of the original SAT). A total of 2,760 responses were obtained, which is around 8.5% of all secondary teachers of English in Kazakhstan. The SAT was made available in Russian (1,036 replies), Kazakh (1,182) and English (542).

The quantitative responses were analysed (by the University of Leicester team) using descriptive statistics and are presented below as a series of graphs which illustrate how competent the responding teachers felt in relation to the nine professional practices they were asked about. The open-ended questions (those not in English were translated) were analysed qualitatively, with a focus on recurrent themes in teachers' responses. The process was challenging, for a variety of reasons:

- many responses were extremely short and lacking in detail
- the level of written English of many respondents was relatively low, with frequent spelling mistakes and grammatical errors often making meaning unclear
- many teachers seemed to misunderstand the purpose of some questions and provided generic answers (i.e. 'we need training') or replies that were not relevant.

The analysis of the open-ended survey questions was completed manually using a form of inductive coding (Sinkovics, Penz and Ghauri, 2008) through which responses were coded and combined into larger thematic categories.

3.2.2. Stakeholder Meetings

As it was not possible for the research team to visit Kazakhstan in person due to COVID restrictions at the time, virtual meetings, interviews, and focus groups with various stakeholders were conducted by one member of the University of Leicester team on Zoom. For each meeting, data were captured through audio recordings (with permission) and/or detailed notes, and these were subsequently reviewed and summarised, leading to the identification of recurrent themes which are presented in the results below. Stakeholder participants represented

- the Ministry of Education
- organisations responsible for professional development, such ORLEU
- pre-service universities (including lecturers and 4th-year students)
- school directors
- teachers and students (Grades 10-11)
- parents.

3.3. Limitations

Some limitations of the data collected from Kazakhstan need to be acknowledged:

1. Self-assessment is susceptible to bias (Little, Goe and Bell, 2009), such as social desirability (Moorman and Podsakoff, 1992). Teachers may consciously or unknowingly provide inflated assessments of their competences or simply not be sufficiently aware of what competence in relation to different professional practices comprises.

2. While a substantial number of teachers completed the SAT, it cannot be claimed that the sample is representative of secondary teachers of English in Kazakhstan.

3. Conducting all the stakeholder meetings remotely (and in English) may have impacted on both the number of participants and how effectively they were able to contribute.

4. COVID restrictions did not allow for visits to schools and thus no additional lessons observations were conducted specifically for this study.

4 RESULTS

4.1. Teacher Self-Assessments

4.1.1. Profile

There were 2,760 responses to the SAT; 94% of the respondents were female and 40% of them had more than 10 years' experience, as Figure 2 shows.

40%

17%

21%

22%

■ 10+ Years ■ 6-10 Years ■ 3-5 Years ■ 1-2 Years
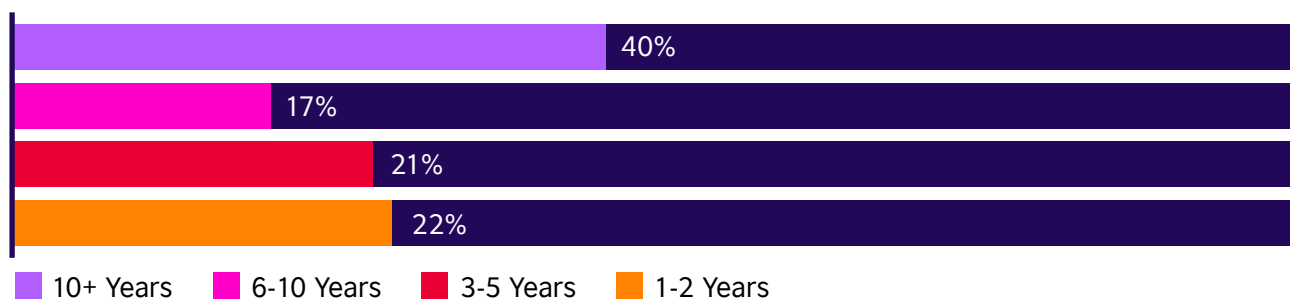
Figure 2: SAT respondents by experience

Respondents were asked to self-assess their own level of English, and Figure 3 shows that the majority considered themselves to be intermediate or above. However, it should be noted that respondents were given the choice of completing the SAT in English, Kazakh, or Russian, and only 19.6% chose English. The evaluations of the professional development projects discussed early (see 2.7.2) also noted limitations in teachers' levels of spoken English. It may be the case, then, that these self-reported estimates of teachers' English proficiency are inflated, at least as far as spoken English is concerned.

- Elementary: 3%
- Pre-Intermediate: 5%
- Intermediate: 37%
- Upper Intermediate: 43%
- Advanced: 12%
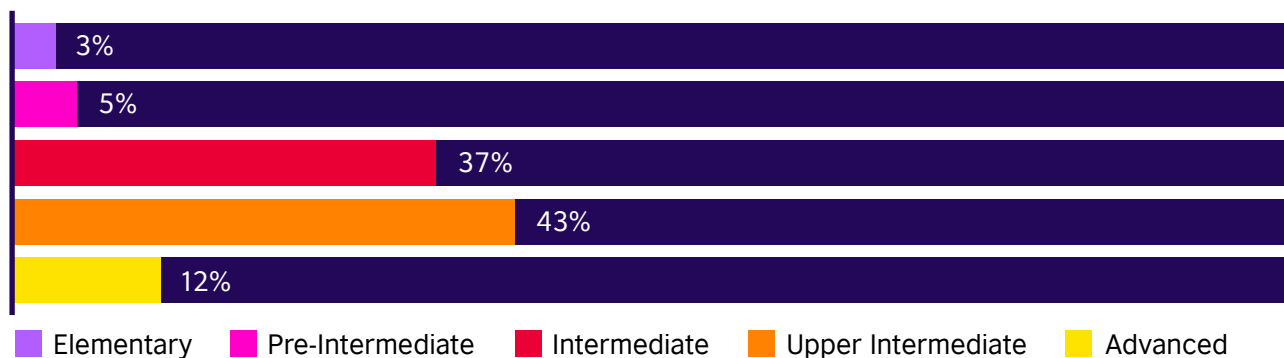
Figure 3: Teachers' self-assessed level of English

4.1.2. SAT Scores

This section presents the results of the quantitative part of the SAT, where teachers were asked to rate their competence in relation to nine professional practices, each of which was further divided into a number of elements. Each theme on the SAT is presented in turn, and an overall table that summarises the areas of teaching respondents across all elements felt less confident in is provided at the end of the section.

Figure 4 shows the results for 'Planning lessons and courses'.
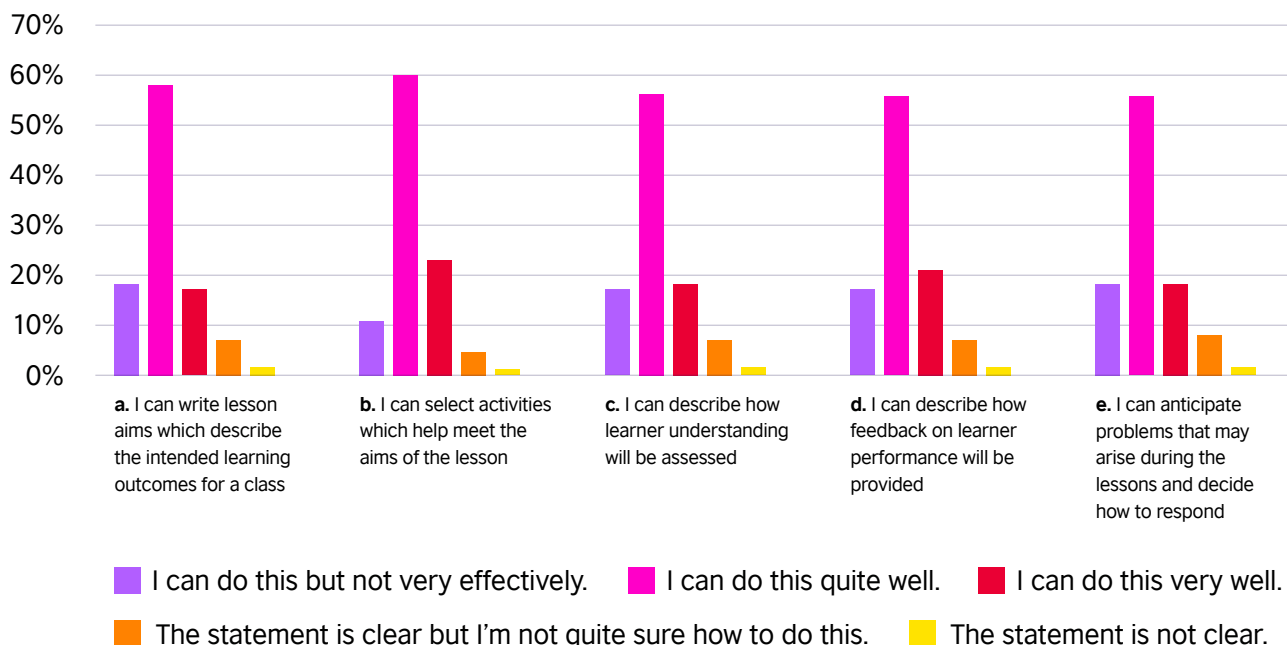
Figure 4: Planning lessons and courses – teacher self-assessments

For all the tasks in this category, the majority of teachers felt that they can perform quite well or very well. It should be noted, though, that a relatively high number of teachers were less confident at writing lesson aims (25%), describing how assessment can be delivered (25%), describing how student feedback can be provided (24%) and responding to problems that arise during a lesson (27%).

Figure 5 shows the results for the second theme on the SAT, 'Managing the lesson'.
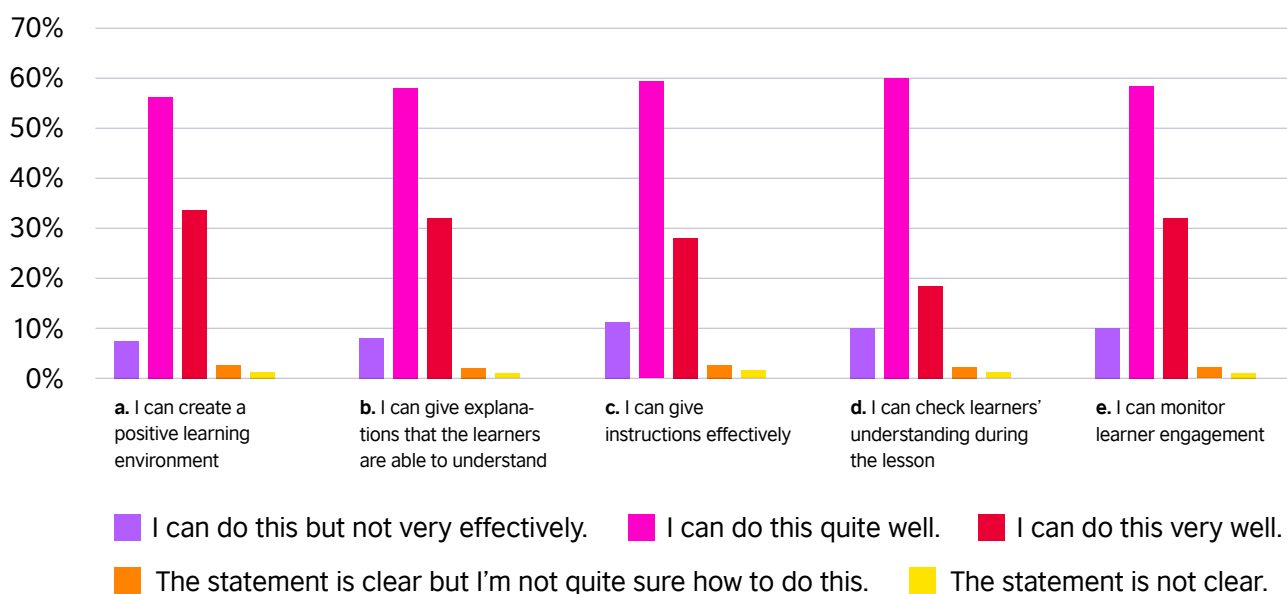
Figure 5: Managing the lesson – teacher self-assessments

Most teachers (at least 86% of the total) believed that they can perform quite well or very well on all of the tasks listed here. Conversely, across these tasks, the percentage of teachers who felt they could not perform effectively never exceeded 14% (which was the figure for 'I can give instructions effectively').

The next professional practice on the SAT was 'Assessing learning' and Figure 6 shows teachers' self-assessments.
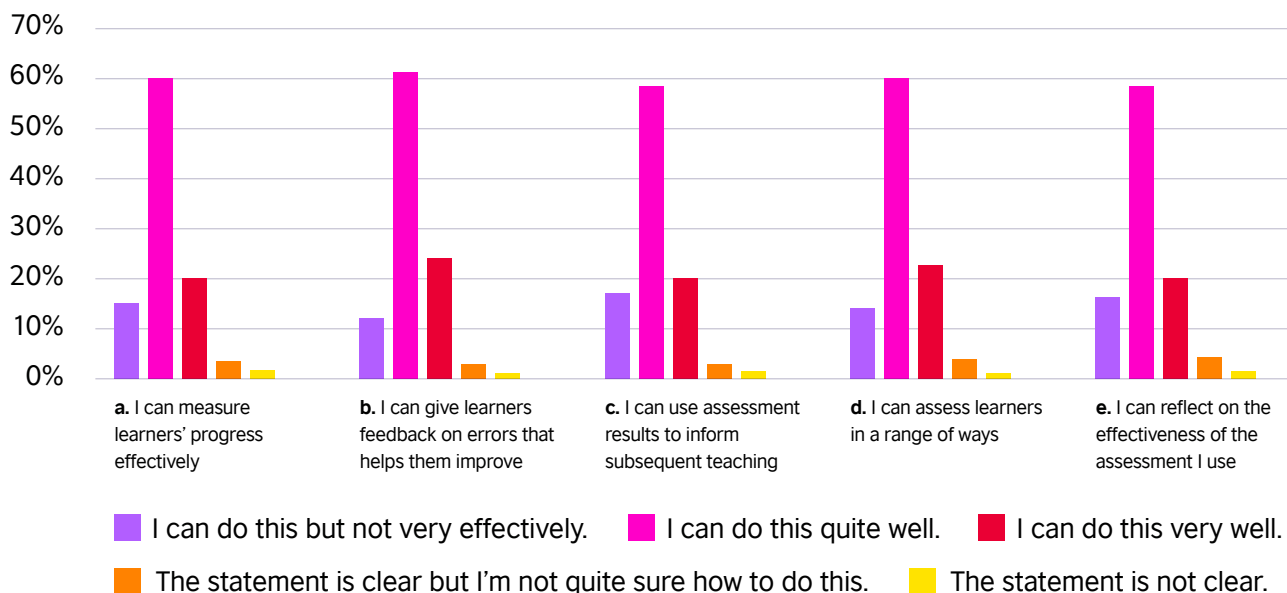
Figure 6: Assessing learning – teacher self-assessments

Teachers' self-assessments for this professional practice were again positive and the majority of teachers (at least 78%) believed they can perform quite well or very well on all tasks. Nonetheless, the proportions of teachers who reported feeling less confident was not insignificant; for example, 22% of the teachers said they were less confident reflecting on the effectiveness of their assessments, while 21% had similar feelings about using assessment results to inform teaching.

Figure 7 shows the results for 'Knowing the subject', which was the fourth theme on the SAT.
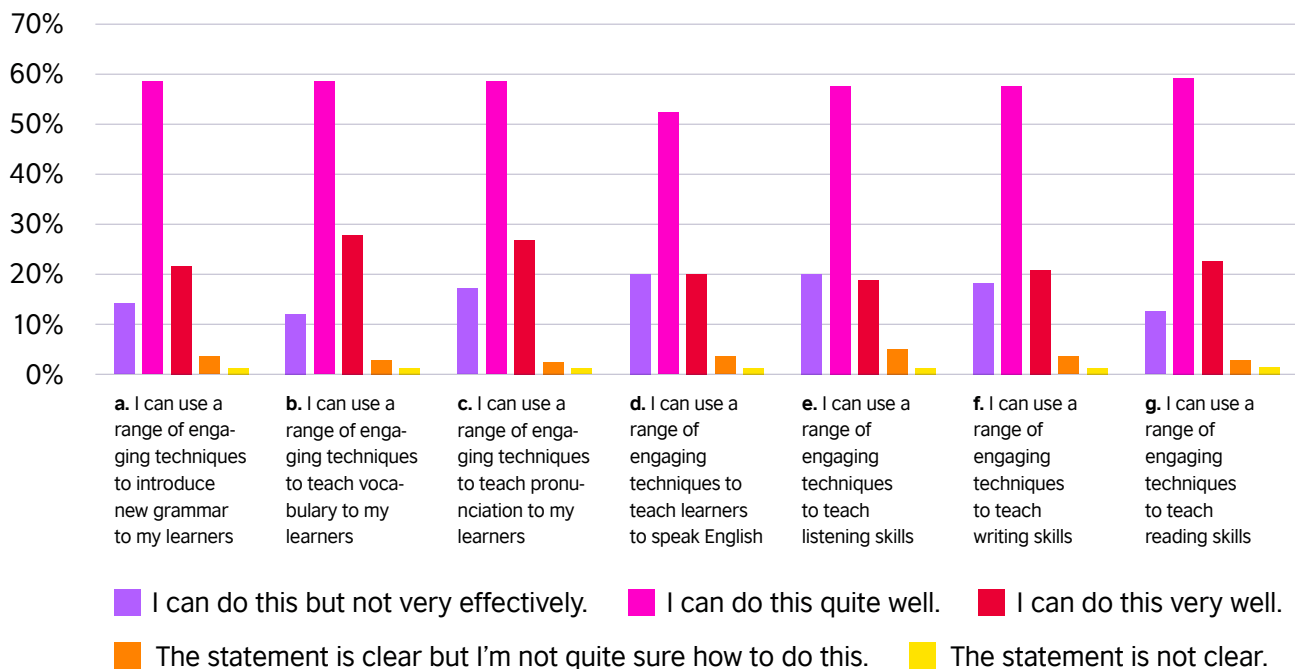
Figure 7: Knowing the subject – teacher self-assessments

This professional practice asked teachers about their ability to teach language systems (such as grammar) and skills (such as reading) using a range of engaging techniques. The elements with the lowest percentage of teachers stating they can complete them quite well or very well were 'd' - teaching learners to speak English (73%) and 'e' – teaching listening (74%). Teaching vocabulary (84%), teaching grammar (82%) and teaching reading (82%) were the top three elements in terms of teachers' self-assessed competence. In contrast, 27% of respondents were less confident in their ability to teach speaking and 26% felt the same about listening.

The next section on the SAT focused on 'Managing resources' and Figure 8 presents the results.

I can do this but not very effectively.
I can do this quite well.
I can do this very well.
The statement is clear but I'm not quite sure how to do this.
The statement is not clear.
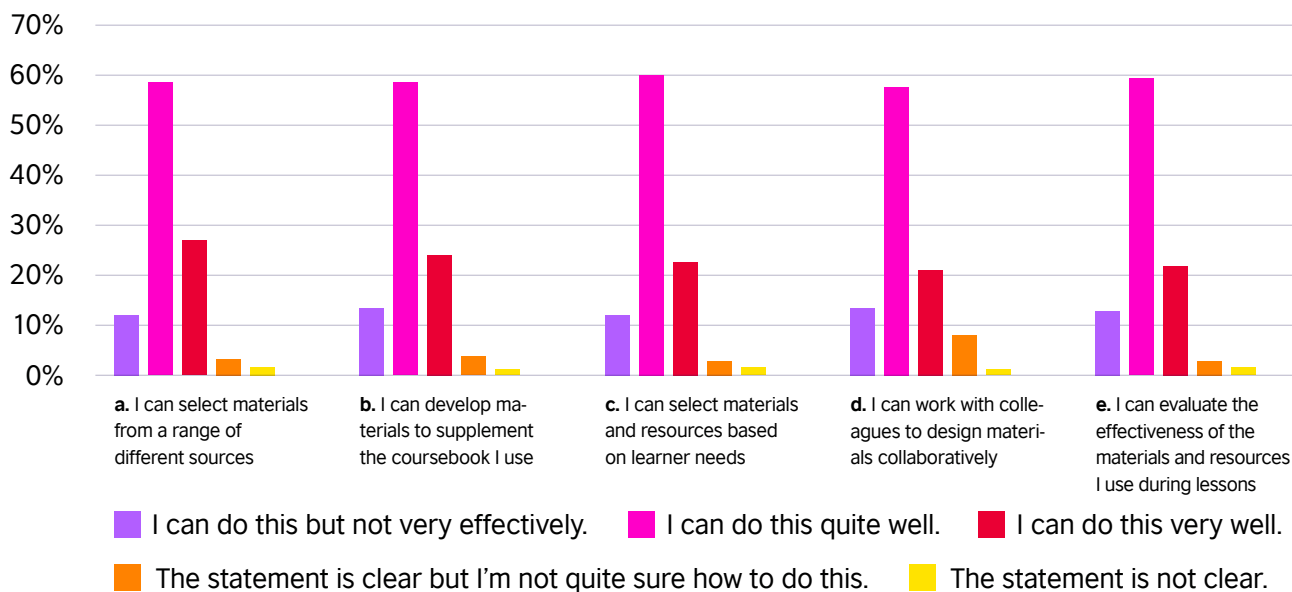
Figure 8: Managing resources – teacher self-assessments

The element which the lowest percentage (77%) of teachers felt they could do quite or very well was 'working with colleagues to design materials collaboratively'; thus almost a quarter of the respondents did not feel this was a task they could complete well. In all other cases, 80% or more of the teachers reported being able to complete tasks quite or very well.

The next professional practice was Integrating ICT and Figure 9 shows how teachers rated their competence in this area.

I can do this but not very effectively.
I can do this quite well.
I can do this very well.
The statement is clear but I'm not quite sure how to do this.
The statement is not clear.
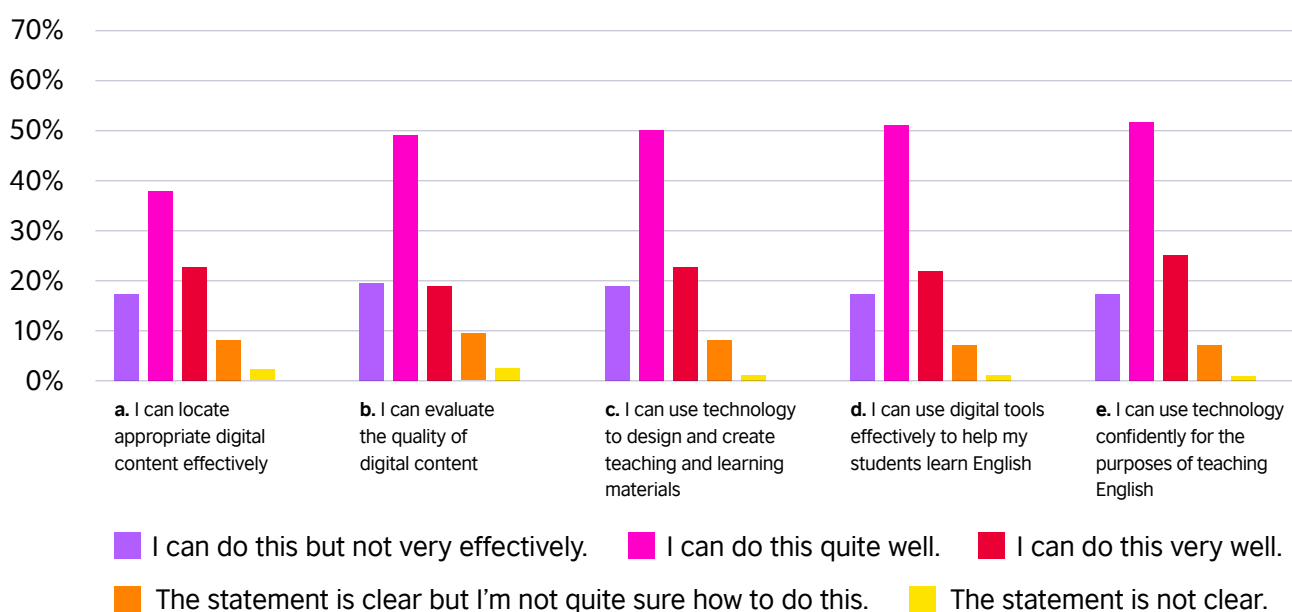
Figure 9: Integrating ICT – teacher self-assessments

While still positive, the percentages of teachers reporting competence in these tasks was low when compared to the other professional practices. The highest self-assessments were for 'using technology confidently for the purposes of teaching English , which 77% said they could do quite or very well. For the remaining elements, at least 25% of the teachers did not feel competent, with the highest levels being for 'evaluating the quality of digital content' (32%).

The seventh professional practice in the SAT was 'Understanding learners', which focuses on how much teachers feel they know about their learners. Figure 10 shows teachers' self-assessments.

How much do you know about your learners?
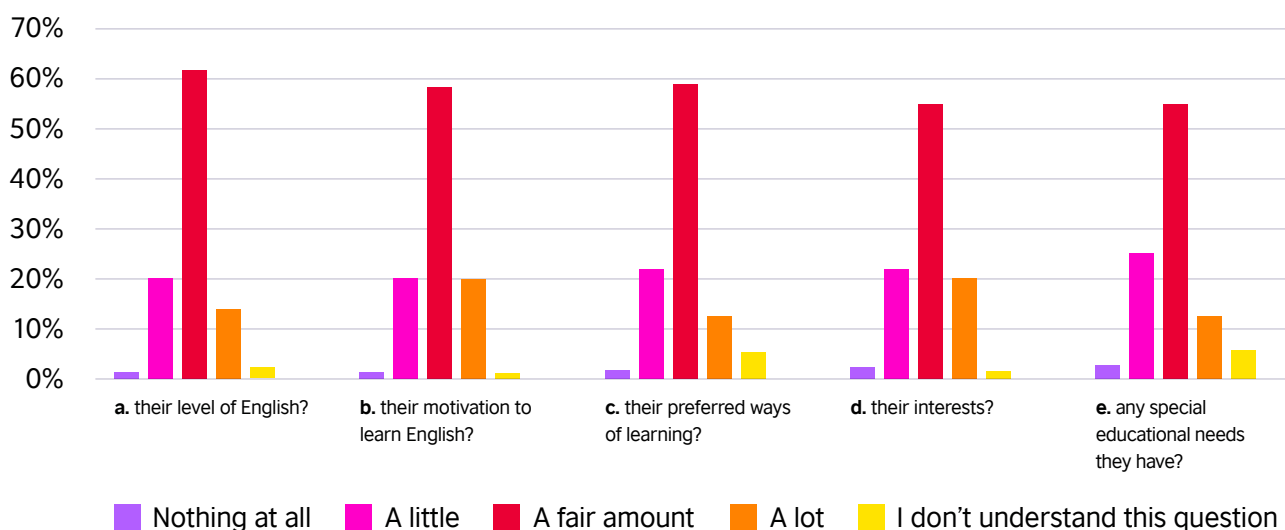
Figure 10: Understanding learners – teacher self-assessments

Relative to most other professional practices, teachers did not show high levels of confidence in their knowledge. For example, only 71% said they know a lot or a fair amount about their students' preferred ways of learning, with the equivalent figure for knowing about students' special educational needs being 67%. For all five elements here, over 20% of the teachers reported not having much knowledge of their learners, with the highest figure in this category being the 32% of the teachers who did not know about their learners' special educational needs.

Promoting 21st-century skills, such as collaboration and creativity, is an important goal of contemporary educational systems and this was the next theme on the SAT. Teacher's self-assessments are presented in Figure 11.
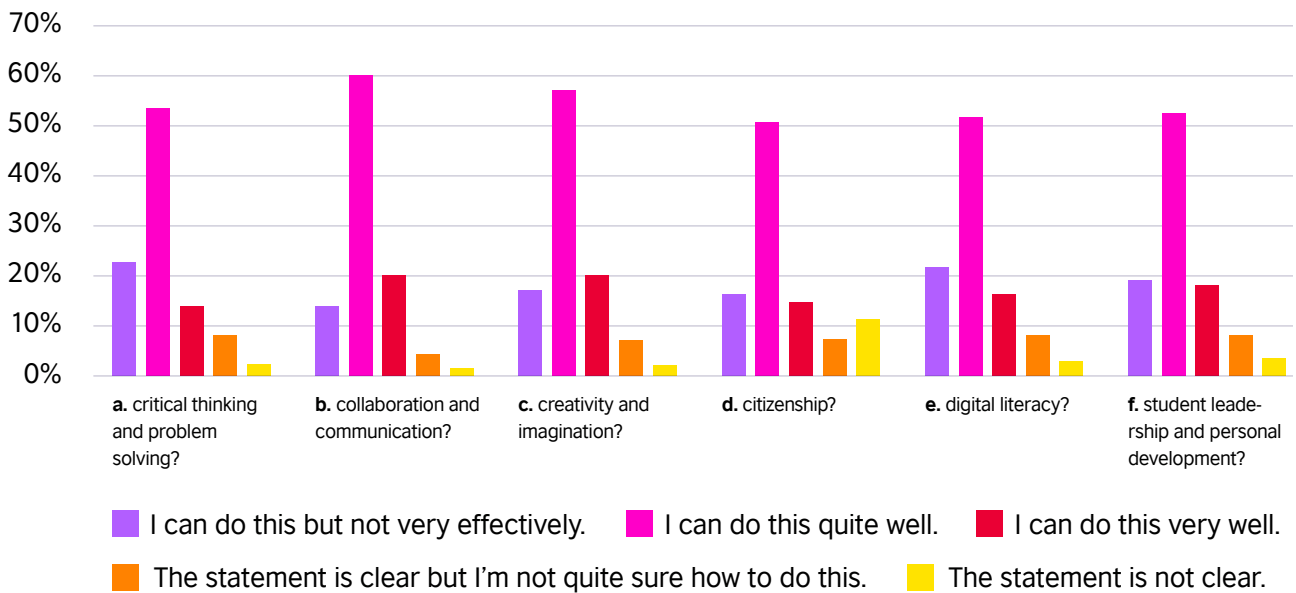
Figure 11: 21st-century skills – teacher self-assessments

Levels of reported confidence varied across the six elements in this category. While 76% of teachers felt they knew how to promote creativity and imagination, only 67% reported knowing how to encourage both critical thinking and problem-solving as well as digital literacy. A substantial proportion of teachers (from 20% up to 35% across different elements), then, do not feel competent in the area of promoting 21st-century skills.

The final professional practice on the SAT was 'Using inclusive practices' and Figure 12 summarises what teachers said.
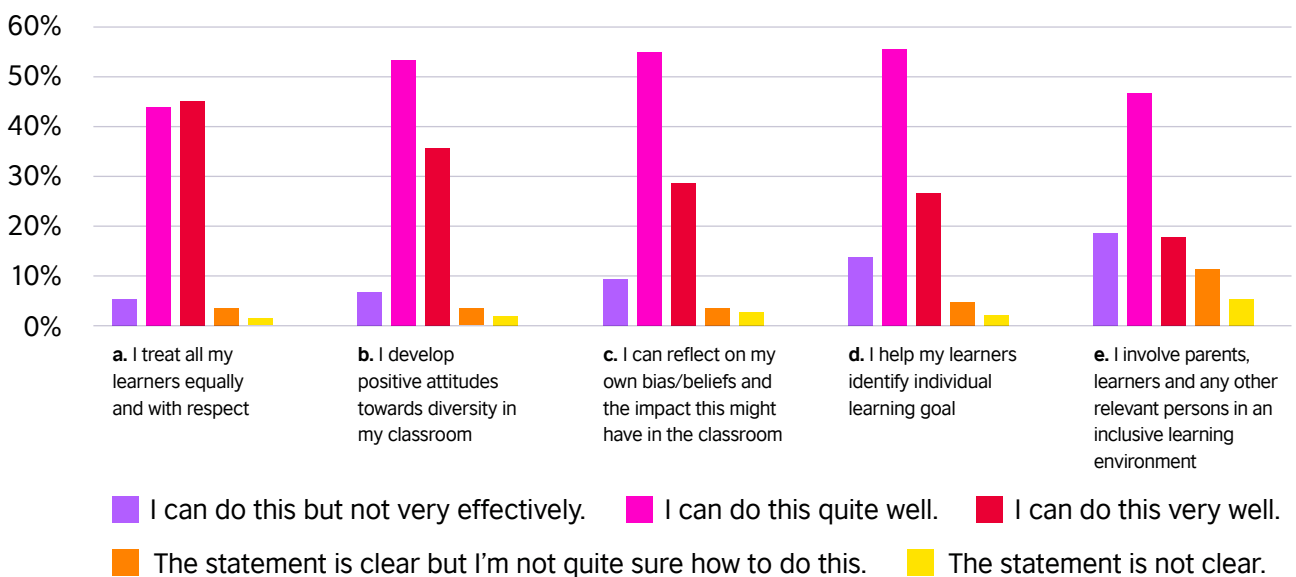
Figure 12: Inclusive practices – teacher self-assessments

The only item where levels of reported competence were low was involving parents and others in an inclusive learning environment; only 66% of the teachers said they could do this quite or very well. For the other four items, teachers self-assessed positively. For example, 91% said they treat learners equally and with respect and 88% develop positive attitudes towards diversity.

Whilst acknowledging the point made in 3.3 that self-assessments of the kind reported here are subject to bias, the results presented above can point towards aspects of their work that secondary teachers of English in Kazakhstan feel less confident about and which might be a productive focus for professional development. Table 1 below lists, in descending order, the individual elements where at least 20% of the respondents felt they were not quite or very competent. Several items relevant to 21st-century skills, ICT and understanding learners appear high in this list, though it must be emphasized that all items are worthy targets for professional development, even more so if we assume that teacher self-assessments of their abilities will often be inflated.

4.1.3. SAT – Open Questions

This section presents the results of the open questions that teachers responded to; there was one open question at the end of each of the nine sections of the SAT. Throughout, the percentages reported below are out of the total sample of 2,760 teachers. For each question there were substantial numbers of answers that were not relevant or hard to understand – these are not included in the charts presented here.

Question 1: What would help you to plan lessons and courses better?

As Figure 13, shows, the most popular responses to this question were general support or training from an expert (29%), additional or improved resources (28%), new or improved classroom technology and/or internet connections (10%) and support/discussion with colleagues (6%). Illustrative comments for 'general support' were 'advanced training courses' and 'qualifications', while for 'improved resources' sample comments were 'properly designed book' and 'methodical books'.

Table 1: Areas for professional development according to SAT scores

Aspects of Practice	% of teachers reporting low competence
I involve parents, learners and any other relevant persons in an inclusive learning environment	35
I can evaluate the quality of digital content	33
I understand learners' special educational needs	33
I can promote critical thinking and problem solving	33
I can promote digital literacy	33
I can promote citizenship	32
I can promote student leadership and personal development	31
I can locate appropriate digital content effectively	28
I can anticipate problems that may arise during the lessons and decide how to respond	27
I can use technology to design and create teaching and learning materials	27
I understand learners' preferred ways of learning	27
I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach my learners to speak English	26
I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach listening skills	26
I can write lesson aims which describe the intended learning outcomes for a class	25
I can describe how learner understanding will be assessed	25
I can use digital tools effectively to help my students learn English	25
I understand learners' interests	25
I can describe how feedback on learner performance will be provide	24
I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach writing skills	24
I can promote creativity and imagination	24
I help my learners identify individual learning goals	24
I understand learners' level of English	23
I can work with colleagues to design materials collaboratively	23
I can use technology confidently for the purposes of teaching English	23
I can reflect on the effectiveness of the assessment I use	22
I understand learners' motivation to learn English	22
I can measure learners' progress effectively	21
I can use assessment results to inform subsequent teaching	21
I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach pronunciation to my learners	20
I can develop materials to supplement the coursebook I use	20
I can promote collaboration and communication	20

3%	
3%	
6%	
10%	
28%	
29%	

■ Help understanding learners ■ Time ■ Collaborating with colleagues ■ Technology
■ Resources ■ Support/Training
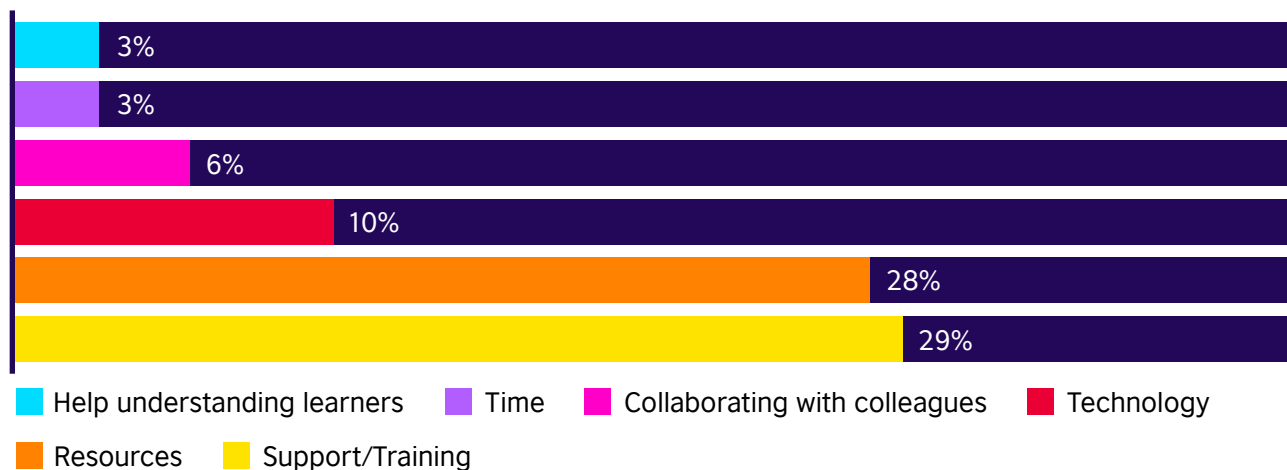
Figure 13: What would help teachers plan better?

Question 2: What would help you manage your lessons better?

The responses to this question are summarised in Figure 14. The most common answers were additional or improved resources (20%), general support or training from an expert (18%), better student attitude or ability (15%), help understanding the needs of learners (14%) and new or improved classroom technology and/or internet connections (6%). Examples of comments teachers made about 'resources' were

- 'Lesson plan, purpose, textbook'
- 'Posters, CDs, interactive whiteboard'
- 'Visual aids'.

Under 'general support', teachers asked for 'effective professional training' and 'methodical guidance'.

4%	
6%	
14%	
15%	
18%	
20%	

■ Time ■ Technology ■ Help understanding learners ■ Improved student ability/attitude
■ Support/Training ■ Resources
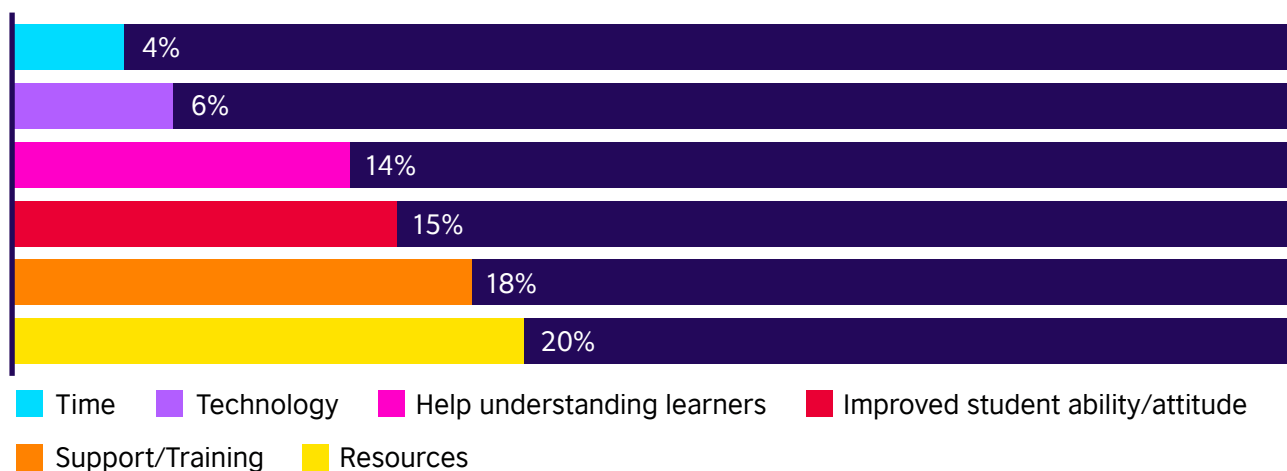
Figure 14: What would help teachers manage lessons better?

Question 3: Can you think of anything that would help you assess classroom learning?

Once again, as Figure 15 shows, the most popular responses to this question were training or support from an expert (28%) and additional or improved resources (22%). Under 'resources', for example, teachers asked for 'various fun exercises' and 'games',

Time | Self-assessment | Positive student relationships | Resources | Support/Training

- Time: 3%
- Self-assessment: 3%
- Positive student relationships: 3%
- Resources: 22%
- Support/Training: 28%
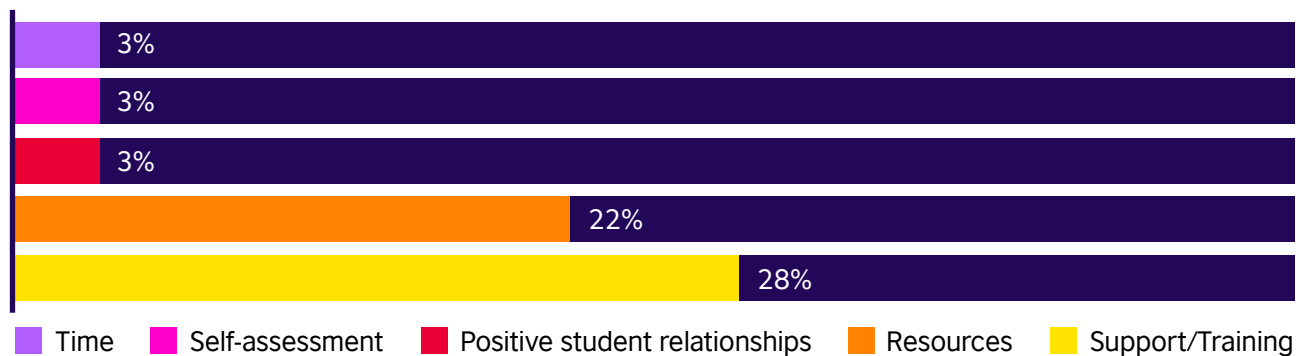
Figure 15: What would help teachers assess classroom learning?

Question 4: Are there any areas listed above that you would like some help with, and, if so, what help?

The areas referred to in this question are the language systems and skills listed in Figure 7 above in relation to the professional practice 'knowing the subject'. Teachers provided a wide range of answers, though, as Figure 16 shows, a general request for support and training again dominated. Listening and speaking were nominated by teachers more than reading and writing. For example, teachers asked for help with 'speaking skills', 'fluent speaking skills', 'listening' and 'teach listening skills'. The absence of references to language systems here suggests teachers see these areas of their work as ones where less further development is needed.

Writing | Reading | Teaching all skills | Listening | Speaking | Support/Training

- Writing: 3%
- Reading: 3%
- Teaching all skills: 3%
- Listening: 5%
- Speaking: 6%
- Support/Training: 18%
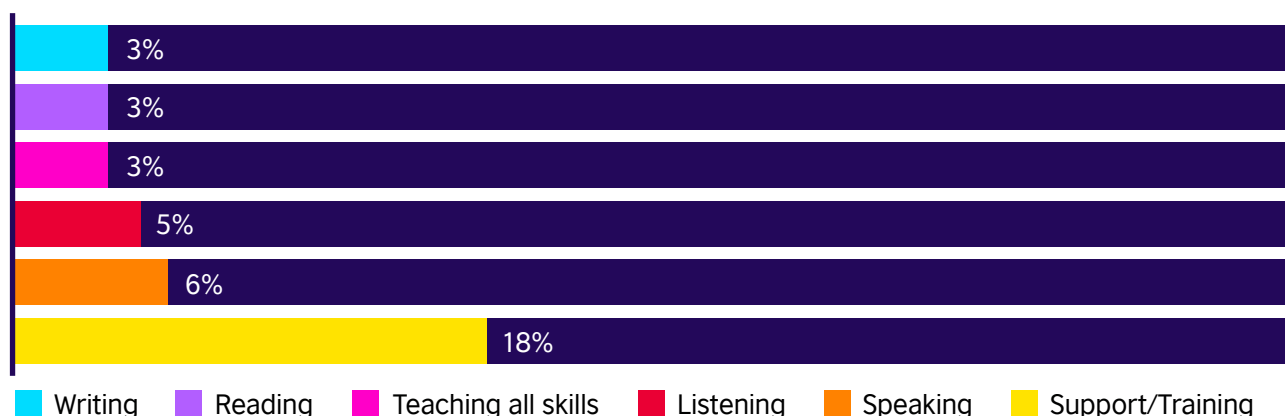
Figure 16: What areas of language teaching do teachers want help with?

Question 5: What would help you access, create, or use teaching resources?

Figure 17 summarises teachers' responses to the fifth open question in the survey. The most common answers referred to new or improved classroom technology and/ or internet connections (33%), additional or improved resources (23%) and training or support from an expert (19%). Illustrative comments related to technology were:

- 'Internet, various sources'
- 'Internet'
- 'Information and communication technology and the Internet'
- 'Using the Internet based on the book'.

3%
19%
23%
33%

■ Advice from colleagues   ■ Support/Training   ■ Resources   ■ Technology
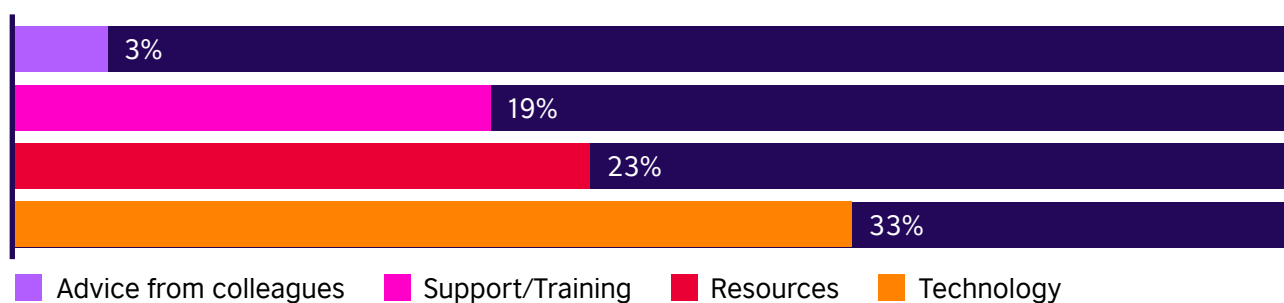
Figure 17: What would help teachers use resources?

Question 6: What issues do you have, if any, using ICT with your students?

The responses to this question (Figure 18) indicated that some 50% of the sample had experienced limited or no access to ICT in schools and this was the dominant answer here. For example, teaches wrote 'Internet speed', 'not enough internet' and 'weakness of the Internet' The only other response of note was the request (by 18%) for additional training in using ICT or support from specialists. A small percentage of teachers (4%) also indicated that they would appreciate guidance on where to locate resources online.

4%
8%
50%

■ Need guidance to find online resources   ■ Support/Training
■ Limited or no access to internet at school

Figure 18: What challenges do teachers face using ICT?

Question 7: Is there anything that would help you to improve any of the above areas?

This question refers to the professional practice 'Understanding learners' (see Figure 10 above). Teachers were first asked to assess their knowledge of various aspects of their learners (such as their motivation, interests and learning needs), then, in this open question, they were asked what support would help them better understand their learners.

Many teachers (20%) simply answered 'no' to this question (Figure 19). Areas where help was requested by a moderate number of respondents included managing student attitude and interest (15%), improved resources, both physical and virtual (9%), additional support or training (8%), help understanding learners (8%) and help learning more about Special Educational Needs (SEN). For example, teachers highlighted the need to improve students' interest by writing:

• 'Increased interest of students in the lessons and the formation of a high level'
• 'It is necessary to increase interest in the language'
• 'Yes. [we need to improve learners'] enthusiasm'.
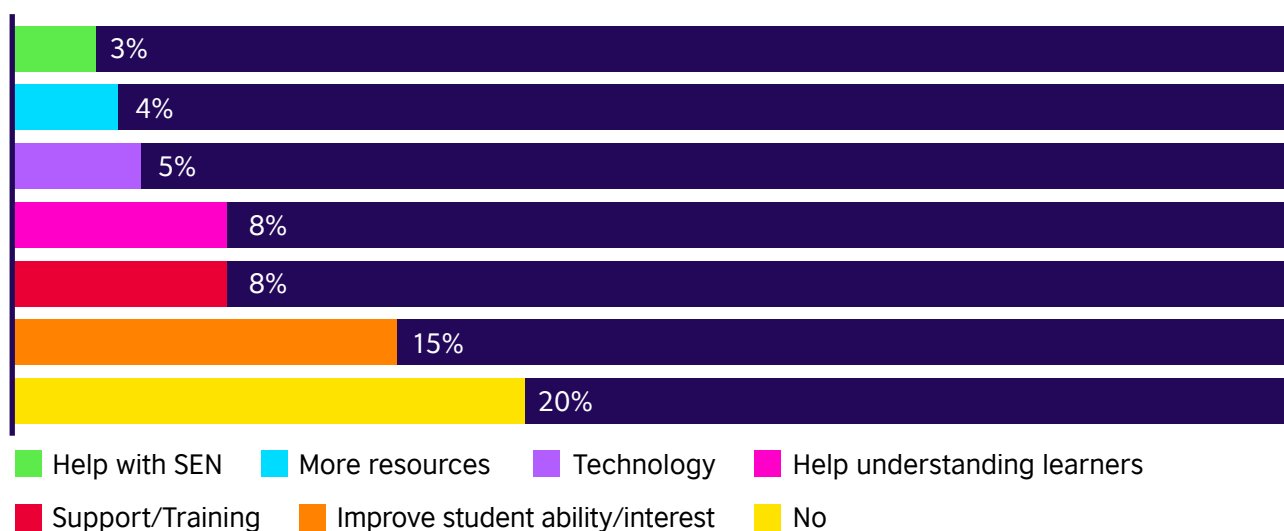
Figure 19: Do teachers need help to better understand their learners?

Question 8: Are these areas that you need help to teach, and, if so, what help?

This question referred to the 21st-century skills previously discussed: critical thinking and problem-solving, collaboration and communication, creativity and imagination, citizenship, digital literacy, and student leadership and personal development. Other than a relatively small number of teachers requesting additional support or training

(16%), the overwhelming majority answered this question with very short answers, often either 'Yes' or, much more commonly, 'No', with no additional explanation (66%).

Question 9: What help do you need to include any of these inclusive practices?

Various inclusive practices were previously listed (see Figure 12) and here teachers were asked about the help they needed to make their teaching more inclusive.

Many teachers (Figure 20) said they did not need help with this area of their work. Other responses included requests for additional support or training (24%), support to encourage parental involvement in the teaching and learning process (8%) and improved resources, both physical and virtual (5%).
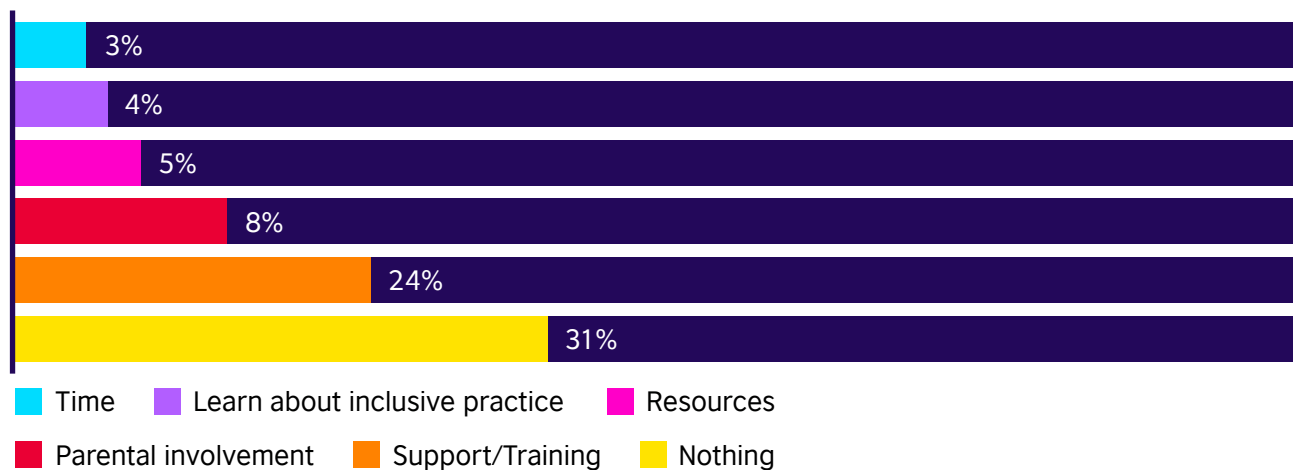
Figure 20: What help do teachers need to make teaching more inclusive?

The open-ended questions included with the SAT did not generate as much insight into teachers' needs as had been envisaged. Large numbers of teachers provided only short answers or responses which suggested they had not understood the open questions; this was not a language issue as it occurred even when responses were provided in Kazakh and Russian. Other teachers answered most questions in the same way – with requests for further training and more resources, including technology. These are not unreasonable requests, though the expectation was that teachers might have provided more specific insights into the kinds of support they need. Perhaps asking teachers to self-assess against 49 individual elements of practice and also to provide extended responses to nine open questions was too demanding and/or time-consuming. It must also be recognised that asking teachers to articulate their needs in this way (and in relation to aspects of practice they were not always familiar with)

was probably a novel exercise for most and one which would have probably been more productively conducted through oral discussion in focus group meetings.

4.2. Stakeholder Meetings

This section summarises the results of the online meetings that were held with various educational stakeholders in Kazakhstan as part of this research.

4.2.1. Importance of English Language

The Education officials, school directors, teacher educators, teachers, parents, and students who were interviewed consistently expressed the view that the English language is very important for future employability. They believed that good English would provide access to more prestigious universities in Kazakhstan and better-paid jobs in international companies. Students also commented that they needed English for working in the music industry, working in ICT, and working as translators.

Many school students expressed an aspiration to study, work, and travel abroad and recognised that they would require a good level of English to do so. To achieve their aspirations, many said they spend 30–60 minutes every evening developing their English skills through the use of mobile applications, listening to music, or watching films and international television, and a few pay for additional tuition. However, it was also pointed out that in some regions and districts of the country, students have low motivation to learn English, as it is not perceived to be important if you are planning to work and live locally.

Many of the teachers provide extra-curricular activities such as clubs and sessions to prepare students for English language Olympiads. Some schools have adapted the curriculum to provide four hours of English instead of three for Grades 10 and 11.

4.2.2. Levels of English Language of School Leavers

Most secondary students who were interviewed expressed a desire to continue their education at university when they finish formal schooling. However, the English language component of the university admission test is optional, so many students do not take it.

Educators estimated that the English language levels of school leavers vary from below A1 in some rural schools to B2 or C1 in Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS).

The lower levels were due to low student motivation and also the modest English levels of some teachers.

4.2.3. Developments in Teaching 21st-Century Skills

All those interviewed agreed that development of 21st-century skills is extremely important, as they are required in a modern workplace. These skills are an integral component of the new curriculum, and English teachers are contributing to their development by engaging students in group activities and presentations. However, when 21st-century skills were fully explained to teachers, it was apparent that they are not developing the full range of team working, leadership, problem-solving, thinking, communication, and ICT skills of their students.

NIS students who have been involved in project-based learning (PBL) have had opportunities to develop a wide range of 21st -century skills. Other teachers need professional development programmes to develop their capacity to effectively implement teaching and learning approaches such as PBL and to support the development of 21st-century skills in classrooms.

4.2.4. Improving Teachers' English

A few school directors were concerned about the English language capabilities of some English language teachers and all STEM teachers and felt that more English language training was required for these teachers. Directors also felt that teachers need more teaching resources to be able to implement national policies in English language and teaching STEM through the medium of English.

4.2.5. Developments in Pre-Service Teacher Education

It was reported that universities have recently gained more autonomy regarding course development, and some are involved in a project funded by the US Embassy that involves them in reviewing their undergraduate courses that lead to students becoming English language teachers. Areas for development highlighted during stakeholder meetings included improving lecturers' pedagogical skills, the development of courses on e-learning and online learning for students and the development and use of new methods of assessment. Departments will require support to implement these developments effectively. University and college lecturers are also keen to have access to new contemporary textbooks and learning resources.

4.2.6. Developments in ICT

The teachers interviewed were eager to use ICT in their classrooms, as many have attended related courses, with some currently involved in online training to develop their expertise. Teachers have also received remedial training to help them run online teaching, although many expressed frustrations regarding internet connections and access to technology. The Ministry has recognised the challenges faced by rural schools and is planning to improve the infrastructure and provide high-speed internet.

Many teachers are using the British Council 'Teach English' online learning resources, PowerPoints, YouTube videos, and other digital resources. Some are also using quiz apps to assess students' learning.
The teachers interviewed were keen to further develop their skills and digital resources to continue to develop the quality of the learning experience for their students. They were committed to continuing their development and developing together through professional learning communities.

4.2.7. Developments in Inclusive Practices

All the participants in focus groups indicated that inclusive practices are important, although most find them challenging to implement, particularly classroom-based differentiation. Many universities provide optional courses for student teachers in addition to those built into the core programme and are making significant steps towards the implementation of inclusive practices. It is an area where support is needed to achieve widespread implementation of good practice in schools.

5 | SUMMARY

This section reviews the aims addressed by this study (see 3.1) and summarises the key findings for each. Recommendations then follow in Section 6.

5.1. Educational Policy and English Language Teaching

Kazakhstan has implemented a range of policies and reforms designed to support the quality of ELT in the country. These include the trilingual language policy, in which English is one of the focal languages, the introduction of English from the start of primary school, an updated curriculum, and measures to support the use of English

in the teaching of STEM subjects. At pre-service level, universities have been given greater autonomy to develop their own programmes for the preparation of teachers of English, while at in-service level, through ORLEU and external organisations such as the British Council and Cambridge English, teachers of English have had access to various forms of professional development. Broader reforms, such as the requirement from 2023 that teachers must upgrade their knowledge every three years and the implementation of new teacher standards, should also contribute further to the professionalisation of teaching and better quality educational provision. The official commitment to improving the country's digital infrastructure and digital skills among the workforce should also impinge positively on the use of technology in schools. Collectively, these conditions are supportive of developments in the teaching and learning of English in the country.

Nonetheless, although no official measures of school leavers' English competence were available for analysis, the view among educational authorities in Kazakhstan is that general levels of English at the end of secondary school are not reaching official targets (B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference). English is only an optional component of the national school leaving examination; this is at odds with the national trilingual language policy and may suggest to students that English is not a high-status subject. This in turn will lower student motivation to perform well in it. Additionally, English is an optional subject on the university admission test (UNT), except for certain specialisations.

Obtaining detailed information about pre-service teacher education programmes for English was a challenge; the autonomy that universities have been given to develop programmes is positive, but competing universities are wary of disclosing full details of their offers. This makes it difficult to examine, for example, the content of programmes and to provide any comparative commentary on the strengths and weaknesses of Kazakhstan's current approach to preparing teachers of English.

There is no doubt that a wide range of professional development opportunities for secondary teachers of English in Kazakhstan are available; what is less clear is whether this work is guided by an over-arching and coherent framework, driven by clearly defined goals. It is positive that many teachers seem to take advantage of self-study professional development resources online, but in terms of systemic change, particularly in relation to improving teachers' spoken English, more systematic interventions are required.

The new teacher standards are also a positive development which should encourage teachers to enhance their competence and, importantly, to be rewarded for doing so. The version of the NQT that English teachers take, though, focuses largely on grammar and vocabulary. The absence of a focus on speaking and listening is a gap since (as noted in 5.2 below), these are the aspects of English proficiency which teachers need to develop most.

In terms of digitalisation, the results of this study indicate that, at school, many secondary teachers of English do not have access to technology and reliable internet and this will also limit their ability to exploit the potential for enhancing English language teaching (including its motivational value) that technology offers.

5.2. Classroom Practices in Secondary ELT

As a result of COVID it was not possible to conduct additional classroom observations for this study; however, data from observations carried out for recent British Council professional development projects was available for further analysis. Key insights to emerge from these observations were that:

1. Teacher and learners generally seemed motivated during English lessons

2. Teachers utilised a wide range of interactive teaching and learning strategies

3. Levels of English proficiency among teachers (particularly spoken proficiency) varied considerably and were often quite low (i.e. characterised by grammatical and pronunciation errors)

4. Teaching was largely textbook-based, though there was also evidence that some teachers were locating and using additional teaching resources

5. Pronunciation was taught largely through reading aloud

6. There was no focus on the development of students' extended writing skills in English

7. Listening was taught as a product (with a focus on correct answers to comprehension questions) rather than also as a process (using pre-, while- and post-listening activities)

8. There was limited focus on the development of a range of 21st-Century skills

9. Peer and self-assessment were not used

10. Teachers' questions tended to be closed and of the display type (i.e. checking knowledge); questions that promote deeper critical thinking were rarely used

11. Teachers used a limited range of corrective feedback strategies (mostly immediate direct correction when students made an oral error in class)

12. There was little evidence of differentiation in classroom activities (i.e. all students did the same work).

These observations point to a range of areas of teaching that can provide an appropriate focus for further professional development work for secondary teachers of English.

5.3. Teachers' Professional Development Needs

A central aim in this study was to examine the professional development needs of secondary school teachers of English in Kazakhstan. Teachers were asked to self-assess their competences as well as to comment on any support they need to improve the quality of their work. As explained earlier (see 3.3), teacher self-assessments are subject to bias and may be inflated, and thus the results summarised here most likely underestimate the level of further development and support that teachers need.

Key findings from the 2,760 teacher self-assessments were:

1. Most teachers felt their level of English was intermediate or above; this finding is at odds with observations of teaching which suggest that, especially for speaking, teachers' levels of proficiency are often quite modest.

2. Across nine professional practices and 49 individual elements of teaching, the majority of teachers assessed their competences quite positively. Teaching 21st-Century skills, Using ICT and Understanding Learners and were the professional practices where largest numbers of teachers indicated lower levels of confidence.

3. As summarised in Table 1 (Section 4.1.2 above), there were 35 elements of teaching where at least 20% (but in seven cases over 30%) of teachers reported lower levels of confidence. The following were the items where more than 25% of respondents said their knowledge was modest:

- involving parents, learners and any other relevant persons in an inclusive learning environment
- evaluating the quality of digital content
- understanding learners' special educational needs
- promoting critical thinking and problem solving
- promoting digital literacy
- promoting citizenship
- promoting student leadership and personal development
- locating appropriate digital content effectively
- anticipating problems that may arise during the lessons and deciding how to respond
- using technology to design and create teaching and learning materials
- understanding learners' preferred ways of learning
- using a range of engaging techniques to teach my learners to speak English
- using a range of engaging techniques to teach listening skills.

These elements reinforce the conclusion that Teaching 21st-Century skills, Using ICT and Understanding Learners were seen by teachers as key areas for development, though the final two items on the list also indicate that teachers feel they need support in developing students' speaking and listening skills in English.

As explained in 4.1.3, teachers' open-ended comments on the kinds of support they need to address their areas of identified need were not particularly insightful; one general but consistent point made by teachers in their answers was that they wanted more training provided by experts, improved resources and better access to technology, especially reliable internet at school.

5.4. Barriers to Progress in Secondary English

Drawing on the full range of evidence analysed as part of this study, the following barriers to progress in secondary English in Kazakhstan can be identified:

1. The optional nature of English in the school graduation examination (and for university admission) lowers its status and has a detrimental impact on students' motivation to study the subject.

2. The absence of a spoken component in the school graduation test for English does not motivate teachers and students to prioritise the development of this skill.

3. While teachers generally self-assessed their own English competence positively, significant variations exist in the English language skills of secondary school teachers of English. In particular, it is likely that in many cases teachers' spoken English is modest.

4. While teachers' assessment of their own pedagogical competence was generally positive, at least 20% of over 2,700 teachers did not feel confident in their knowledge of over 70% of the teaching elements they self-assessed against. Assuming this figure is conservative, a significant proportion of secondary teachers have development needs in a wide range of pedagogical areas.

5. Classroom observations also indicated that secondary teachers of English can further develop their competences in a wide range of fundamental areas, including the teaching of the four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing), assessment, differentiation, 21st-Century skills, corrective feedback and questioning.

6. The evidence analysed for this study also concludes that learning during English lessons remains largely focused on language systems, such as grammar, and does not engage students in deeper levels of critical thinking.

7. Many teachers do not feel that they have access to the instructional resources they require to make English lessons more motivating.

8. The National Qualification Test teachers of English take to demonstrate their competence and improve their formal status does not address their classroom competence or speaking and listening skills; teachers can thus reach higher levels on the teacher standards despite limitations in these critical areas of competence.

9. While teachers may have many opportunities for professional development, these are not necessarily linked to career stage or career advancement; also, they are not always subject-specific, co-ordinated or focused in a coherent way on enhancing the competences required for effective English teaching at secondary level.

10. Approaches to professional development remain strongly rooted in training models, with limited evidence of school-based, teacher-led and collaborative approaches to teacher growth (the Online Teacher Community programme, which provides a community of practice approach, is an exception here – see 2.7.2).

Additionally, while this study has not analysed the quality of primary school English teaching and pre-service English language teacher education, these are two additional factors which will impact significantly on English outcomes at secondary level.

These conclusions about the factors that affect secondary level English achievement in Kazakhstan form the basis of the recommendations that are now presented.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Informed by the research presented here, this section makes recommendations for addressing factors which limit student outcomes in secondary level English in Kazakhstan.

6.1. Status of English in High-Stakes Tests

While English is a compulsory foreign language at school and a focus of Kazakhstan's trilingual education policy, these measures are somewhat undermined by the fact that English is an optional subject in the secondary school graduation test and for admission to university (with some exceptions). The status of English, and consequently students' attitudes and motivations in relation to it, would be significantly enhanced if the subject were a compulsory component of high-stakes tests at the end of secondary school and this seems a reasonable recommendation to make given Kazakhstan's language policy and its 2050 strategy.

6.2. Language Competences in High-Stakes Tests

The optional English test for secondary school leavers consists of reading and writing tasks. The absence of a focus on speaking and listening does not motivate teachers and students to focus on these skills and it is recommended that a focus on speaking and listening be integrated into formal assessments of students' English at the end of secondary school.

6.3. Teacher Appraisal Criteria

The new teacher standards for Kazakhstan allow teachers to upgrade their status by reaching specific levels on the National Qualifications Test. The test that English teachers take, though, focuses largely on their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary,

with some attention also to reading skills. The absence of any focus on teachers' speaking and listening skills implies that these are not important elements in the competence of teachers of English. The test will not motivate teachers to improve these skills and teachers can achieve the highest status on the teacher standards even if their spoken English is modest. Additionally, while teachers may submit a portfolio with evidence of their achievements (such as certificates), their classroom competence is not directly evaluated. Thus, again, teachers may achieve high status irrespective of pedagogical skill. It is recommended that English teacher appraisal for the purpose of improved status should include measures of (a) their speaking and listening skills and (b) actual performance in the classroom (which could be assessed, for example, through video recorded lessons).

6.4. Teacher Preparation

English language pre-service teacher education in Kazakhstan is evolving, and universities have increasing autonomy to define their own programmes. The quality of graduates has a significant impact on the teaching they subsequently provide and the achievements of their students in English. As part of measures to improve English outcomes at secondary level, it is recommended that a more focused review be undertaken of the quality of pre-service programmes for English. This would encompass issues such as admission criteria, programme content and structure, attention to students' English language improvement, assessment, teaching practice, graduation requirements and quality assurance mechanisms. Academic staff should also be included in the review to identify their professional competences and professional development needs. The review could take place in two phases: a self-assessment task by universities (using standard templates and criteria) and a subsequent external review of these, leading to a report that highlights strengths and makes suggestions for improving English teacher preparation.

There is evidence that additional support for pre-service teachers of English is being developed by ORLEU and partners such as the British Council, which is piloting an Online Teacher Community platform for prospective English teachers. In order to understand their quality and to maximise their coherence, such initiatives should also form part of any review of pre-service English teacher education in Kazakhstan.

6.5. English Teacher Language Competence

The quality of English learning will be enhanced when teachers provide appropriate (fluent and accurate) models of spoken English for their students. One conclusion from this study is that secondary school teachers' levels of English vary significantly. More systematic study is needed to quantify the situation, but it can be reasonably assumed, drawing on various sources of data such as classroom observations and teacher performance during interviews, that spoken confidence and competence among secondary English teachers are often low. This will limit their willingness and ability to speak English in class and to motivate students to speak English themselves. While teachers have access to self-study or independently funded opportunities to develop their English, reform on a national level will require more systematic interventions. Courses such as the British Council's *English for Teaching*, which has been designed for teachers with modest levels of English, may provide a useful model, though more intensive language-specific initiatives can also be considered. Given the impact that teachers' spoken English competence can have on the quality of teaching and learning generally, it is recommended that strategies for (a) assessing teachers' spoken English and (b) providing intensive support to develop it be considered by the educational authorities in Kazakhstan. Professional development that focuses on pedagogical strategies will not achieve the intended benefits unless teachers' levels of spoken English are at an appropriate level (as noted in Section 2.7, SCES targets for secondary English are B1-B2; while ideally those for teachers would exceed these, this may not be realistic, at least in the short to medium-term; some lowering of the SCES targets might, therefore, also be considered).

6.6. English Teacher Pedagogical Knowledge

It is clear that professional development initiatives in recent years have given many secondary school English teachers opportunities to enhance their pedagogical knowledge, both in terms of background theory as well as by acquiring practical classroom skills and strategies. The results of this study, though, suggest that teachers require ongoing support to develop their understandings of and ability to implement a range of fundamental ideas in education generally and language teaching specifically. It is recommended that note be made of the salient areas for development highlighted in this report and that targeted programmes to address these be made available to teachers. Priority areas would include the teaching of the four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing), assessment, differentiation, 21st-Century skills, corrective feedback and teacher questioning (especially to promote critical thinking).

6.7. English Teaching and Assessment

While some observational data informed the conclusions of this report, only a modest sample of lessons was examined and, to provide the basis of professional development work that reflects teachers' needs, it is recommended that a more systematic (though not necessarily very large) programme of classroom observations be set up. The purpose of the programme would be to describe secondary English teachers' practices in teaching and assessing students and to identify aspects of these practices where professional development would be beneficial.

6.8. Resources for Teaching

A recurrent request by teachers in this study was that they require improved access to a range of teaching resources and technologies, including stable internet at school. Ensuring schools have good internet access should be one of the priorities in the country's attempts to improve its technological infrastructure. This would in turn provide teachers with easier access to a wide range of resources and applications that could be used in classrooms to support learning. Better resources in themselves will not improve the quality of education; alongside other measures that seek to improve teacher competence and learning outcomes, though, improved access to resources for teachers can make a difference to the quality of their work.

6.9. Continuing Professional Development

Secondary teachers of English in Kazakhstan do have access to a wide range of opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD) and it is recommended that current provision be reviewed and mapped onto a coherent framework; this would have several benefits, including crystallizing the key objectives of secondary English teacher professional development, identifying overlap, inconsistencies and gaps in existing provision, understanding current delivery models, and assessing the distribution of developmental opportunities (for example, comparing rural and urban teachers). CPD will be more effective when it targets specific outcomes in a consistent and coherent manner.

A second recommendation relevant to current CPD provision stems from the observation that it remains largely rooted in a training model of delivery (and only training courses receive official Ministry accreditation). Thus, teachers typically engage in CPD by attending courses and workshops and learning from expert instructors. There is clearly a role for effectively designed CPD of this kind, but, to extend the range and

frequency of professional development opportunities available to teachers, it is also important for alternative models to be considered. This might include approaches that emphasise collaborative, teacher-led and school-based professional learning, such as mentoring, peer observation, lesson study (group planning) and teacher communities of practice. In many cases such activities will be new to teachers and schools and it would, therefore, be important to ensure that new approaches to CPD are introduced with appropriate support and guidance for school directors and teachers. School-based CPD also has the advantage of being able to target teachers' immediate needs, in contrast to larger-scale programmes which are typically more general in their focus.

Additional forms of professional development will have improved impact when these are officially accredited; while teachers will still engage in professional development they find effective even if it is not officially recognised (this is the case, for example, with the British Council Online Teacher Community platform – see 2.7.2), it is recommended that the educational authorities review their accreditation criteria to encourage the provision of novel high-quality approaches to professional development which have recognised value in the international literature (and which may also be provided by international or non-governmental organisations).

A final recommendation for CPD interventions relates to the need for evaluations of medium-term impact. Projects (such as those described in 2.7.2) are thoroughly evaluated when they end, but no information is available about the extent to which the benefits reported then are still visible six-months or one year later. Funding for medium-term impact assessment should thus be built into project budgets.

6.10. Primary English Teaching

An analysis of English teaching at primary level was beyond the scope of this study, but it must be acknowledged that this also has an impact on secondary level outcomes. Students' attitudes and motivations towards the language will be defined through their early experiences with it at primary level. Effective outcomes at primary level will also provide a sound basis for progress in English at secondary school. The quality of English teaching in primary schools, therefore, also merits attention as part of attempts to understand the factors that contribute to secondary English outcomes. It is thus recommended that a review of primary ELT in Kazakhstan also be carried out to understand teacher competences, teaching and assessment practices, professional needs and engagement in CPD, students' attitudes to English, and their levels of achievement in the language at the end of primary school.

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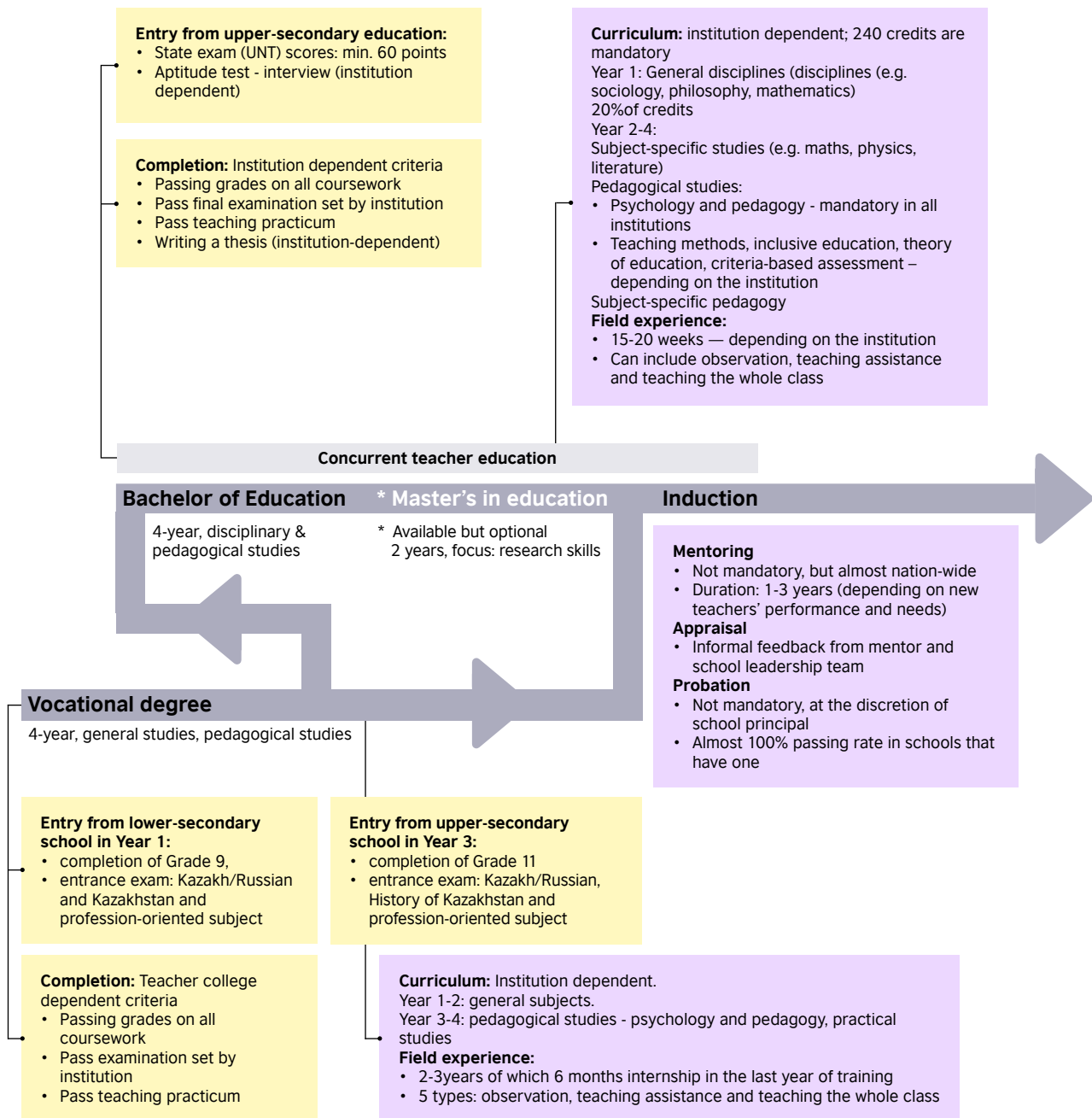
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APPENDIX

Pathways to teaching in Kazakhstan (OECD, 2020)

Entry from upper-secondary education:
- State exam (UNT) scores: min. 60 points
- Aptitude test - interview (institution dependent)

Completion: Institution dependent criteria
- Passing grades on all coursework
- Pass final examination set by institution
- Pass teaching practicum
- Writing a thesis (institution-dependent)

Curriculum: institution dependent; 240 credits are mandatory
Year 1: General disciplines (disciplines (e.g. sociology, philosophy, mathematics) 20%of credits
Year 2-4:
Subject-specific studies (e.g. maths, physics, literature)
Pedagogical studies:
- Psychology and pedagogy - mandatory in all institutions
- Teaching methods, inclusive education, theory of education, criteria-based assessment – depending on the institution
Subject-specific pedagogy
Field experience:
- 15-20 weeks — depending on the institution
- Can include observation, teaching assistance and teaching the whole class

Concurrent teacher education

Bachelor of Education

4-year, disciplinary & pedagogical studies

* Master's in education

* Available but optional
2 years, focus: research skills

Induction

Mentoring
- Not mandatory, but almost nation-wide
- Duration: 1-3 years (depending on new teachers' performance and needs)
Appraisal
- Informal feedback from mentor and school leadership team
Probation
- Not mandatory, at the discretion of school principal
- Almost 100% passing rate in schools that have one

Vocational degree

4-year, general studies, pedagogical studies

Entry from lower-secondary school in Year 1:
- completion of Grade 9,
- entrance exam: Kazakh/Russian and Kazakhstan and profession-oriented subject

Entry from upper-secondary school in Year 3:
- completion of Grade 11
- entrance exam: Kazakh/Russian, History of Kazakhstan and profession-oriented subject

Completion: Teacher college dependent criteria
- Passing grades on all coursework
- Pass examination set by institution
- Pass teaching practicum

Curriculum: Institution dependent.
Year 1-2: general subjects.
Year 3-4: pedagogical studies - psychology and pedagogy, practical studies
Field experience:
- 2-3years of which 6 months internship in the last year of training
- 5 types: observation, teaching assistance and teaching the whole class

NOTES

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This report examines the status of English language teaching (ELT) in secondary schools in Kazakhstan. It highlights policies and programmes which are supportive of progress in secondary ELT in the country and, informed by research with teachers and other key stakeholders, also identifies factors which limit secondary outcomes in the learning of English. Several of these factors have implications for the initial preparation and ongoing professional development of teachers of English as well as for the status of English in key school-leaving and university admission assessments. The report makes a number of recommendations for how secondary English outcomes in Kazakhstan can be strengthened.