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International Students' Engagement in Learning Languages Other Than English (LOTE) at an EMI University in Kazakhstan

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the increasing internationalization of higher education, understanding how to effectively engage international students is crucial. Previous research mainly examined students' motivation from various theoretical perspectives but none of the published studies specifically focused on international students' engagement in learning Kazakh as a language other than English (LOTE). Thus, the aim of the article is to identify and analyze the factors that facilitate the engagement of international students in learning Kazakh as a LOTE at an English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) university in Kazakhstan through an exploratory qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews with 12 participants. The findings reveal that such psychological constructs as growth mindset, sense of competence, grit, proactiveness, ownership, and external supportive learning environment are important in fostering successful language acquisition. Overall, the findings of this research extend the existing literature on LOTE with an evidence-based understanding of international students' LOTE learning beliefs with individual–psychological perspectives on engagement with LOTEs. Such knowledge is necessary to draw a comprehensive landscape of international students' LOTE learning to support their adaptation to the host university.

Keywords: Languages Other Than English; LOTE; Language Learner Engagement; International Students; Kazakh Language

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1. Introduction

The mobility of international students has significantly risen during the last few decades, from 2 million to 6.36 million between 2000 and 2020[1, 2]. This trend is driven by the internationalization of higher education to promote a diverse and multilingual environment. Although multilingualism is considered as the norm in today's globalized society[3], there has been a longstanding monolingual bias in the existing literature due to the global dominance of English[4].

Furthermore, supporting the learning of the host country's language is a crucial factor to improve international students' academic and social integration with the host community[3]. International students encounter substantial challenges when learning a language of the host country, which influences their motivation and general progress. Students' engagement, which is the manifestation of this motivation, is a central topic in the literature on student experience in higher education[5].

However, it remains largely unknown what factors enhance or hinder international students' engagement with the learning of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) in various geographical contexts. To the best of our knowledge, there is no published empirical account on international students' LOTE engagement, despite an increasing scholarly interest to LOTEs in higher education[4, 6–8]. Such knowledge is necessary to draw a comprehensive landscape of international students' LOTE learning to support their adaptation to the host university.

Learning a LOTE is beneficial because it fosters the development of social skills, cognitive competence, and the ability to communicate across cultural boundaries[9]. As a possible solution to address issues of intercultural communication in higher education, learning a LOTE has been indicated as a successful contributor to international students' intercultural competence development[10]. However, there is an imbalance in the existing research toward the learning of English due to its global dominance, resulting in the scarcity of literature on the use of instructional materials and methods in LOTE education. The literature continuously emphasizes that LOTE programs at universities still seem to receive fewer resources compared to English programs[9]. Arguably, this lack of resources leads not only to the shortage of instructional materials but also impacts the quality of learning and teaching LOTE. Thus, more research is needed to examine LOTE education to promote diversity and multilingualism in line with an increasing trend towards internationalization of higher education[4, 9, 11].

Research on international students' challenges and motivations when learning Kazakh as a LOTE is limited. One of the studies available so far[12] explored African international students' identity development at a Kazakhstani university with English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and found that due to the lack of proficiency in local languages, the students had difficulty securing part-time work and socializing with other students. The study called for a need of future empirical research on self-funded international students who represent most of these students in Kazakhstan from different countries studying at various EMI universities.

The present research addresses the above calls and aims to provide a better understanding of LOTE learning that can result in more successful teaching practices and instructional methods by examining a diverse group of international students' engagement with learning the Kazakh language at an EMI university in Kazakhstan.

2. Literature Review

Learner engagement is essential to successful learning experience. It refers to the dynamic state of mind, when learners are actively thinking about, focusing on, and enjoying their language learning[13].

A few theoretical frameworks are associated with engagement. According to the self-determination theory[14], learners achieve optimal engagement if they feel competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Competence is a learner's sense of mastery and efficacy and of their effort that can influence the outcomes. Autonomy refers to a learner's sense of ability to regulate their learning and actions and having control over their learning, while relatedness is a learner's sense of being socially connected to and cared about by others.

Drawing on the self-determination theory, Mercer and Dörnyei[15] proposed a framework of the facilitative learner mindset which is "an optimal facilitative psychological frame of mind" (p. 49) that facilitates engagement and includes the following learner-internal factors: promoting a sense of competence, a growth mindset, ownership, proactiveness, and grit. Taken together, these factors create a readiness for learners to become engaged along with a supportive learning

environment, which is also important to facilitate language learning process.

A sense of competence refers to students' confidence in their language learning abilities. A growth mindset, a concept developed by Dweck[16], refers to students' beliefs about their ability to learn and improve their language skills through effort and dedication. Ownership involves taking control of learning and personal investment in the success of learning. Proactiveness is about students taking control of their learning process, such as setting their own goals, selecting learning materials, or seeking additional resources independently. Grit, initially proposed by Duckworth et al.[17], combines passion, perseverance, resilience, and positive attitude toward a long-term goal. Overall, to be willing and ready to engage, students need to possess the right frame of mind to do so.

The literature consistently highlights the role of student engagement in learning a LOTE. Research shows that learners with higher levels of engagement and motivation tend to achieve greater language proficiency and demonstrate greater resilience in their language learning journey[6, 15]. Employing narrative accounts and semi-structured interviews, An and Zheng[18] examined how multilingual learners are self-motivated to exercise their agency in the process of learning Arabic as a LOTE at a Chinese university. They found that the participants' agentive selves were multifaceted, and their actions transformed LOTE learning practices. Similarly, a multiple case-study of three Japanese students learning Korean or German as a LOTE at a Japanese university[19] explored the participants' LOTE learning motivation and persistence. The research reveals different motivational paths and how the participants persisted to achieve their learning goals demonstrating the value of learning a LOTE.

The significance of learning a LOTE as perceived by Chinese undergraduates has been demonstrated in a longitudinal qualitative research[20] conducted over a course of one academic year at a Chinese university. The findings show how the students' learning experiences interacted with their situated contexts and was crucial for the students to understand the value of learning a LOTE. Another recent study conducted in the context of Thai higher education[21] explored the motivations of 167 Thai students learning Japanese as a third LOTE. Using a questionnaire and focus group, the study found that factors influencing students' motivations for

LOTE learning can vary across different contexts and learner characteristics. Furthermore, the research highlighted the need for future studies on LOTE learning for a better understanding of motivational factors as the students' motivations are multifaceted and unique to their interests and experiences.

Apart from the factors that might impact students' LOTE experiences, research has also shed some light on the dynamic learning experiences of LOTE students in a transnational higher education context. Adopting an institutional ethnographic approach, a study explored the complexities of intercultural communication in a transnational higher education setting, highlighting how the implementation of EMI education can perpetuate language ideologies and "imagined communities"[22]. Similarly, in the context of EMI university setting in Kazakhstan, previous research[23] has shown how multilingual students in EMI programs negotiate multiple linguistic identities due to the existing discourses shaping language ideologies.

As for published research focusing on international students' learning of Kazakh as a LOTE, one of the few studies looked at African international students' experiences at an EMI university[12]. This research examined reflections of six African second-year master's students on their international educational experiences in Kazakhstan. The international students had limited opportunities to contribute to group-work assignments and find employment opportunities due to a lack of Kazakh language skills. Additionally, the international students did not invest time to learn local languages (Kazakh and Russian) as these languages were not considered important for students' lives abroad, especially since they were studying at a highly reputable EMI university in Kazakhstan. One of the limitations of this research is that all the participants were on scholarship programs and specific factors influencing engagement in LOTE learning remained unclear.

In the context of EMI university setting in Japan, the study by Kojima and Fukui[24] examined international students' motivation to learn Japanese as a LOTE and found that scarcity of opportunities to use a LOTE and negative learning experiences had a negative impact on the students' motivation.

Taken together, these studies highlight the importance of recognizing the nuanced language learning experiences of LOTE students and the need for more comprehensive

support and pedagogical approaches that cater to the needs of international students in host countries. Studies mainly examined the students' motivation from various theoretical perspectives but none of the published studies specifically focus on LOTE students' engagement. Furthermore, from the point of research methodology, there is no published research that analytically employs the framework of the facilitative learner mindset to examine students' LOTE engagement[15]. Additionally, more research is needed on LOTE education from Asian countries, which is an important region in promoting multilingualism and addressing the global dominance of English[11]. Some Asian countries including Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan set out to broaden the LOTE repertory of its citizens through financial investments, in contrast to the major Anglophone countries with the growing English-only monolingual mentality[7]. Examining multilingual education expansion in the Asian region might have a significant influence for the prospects of multilingual and multicultural development at universities around the world. However, in the existing literature, this region is currently represented mostly by China and Japan. The present research addresses the above-identified gaps through the following research question:

> What factors facilitate the engagement of undergraduate international students in learning Kazakh as a LOTE at a university in Kazakhstan?

3. Methodology

This research was conducted at a university in Kazakhstan, a former Soviet country located in Central Asia, in which Kazakh is the state language and Russian is an official language. It was selected as the research site due to the researchers' location in the country, which allowed the team to deeply engage with the local linguistic environment and educational practices in a multilingual setting.

The study is part of a larger research project on students' experiences of learning Kazakh as a LOTE at various educational settings in Kazakhstan. International students learning Kazakh as a LOTE were invited to take part in this research using purposeful sampling method. Twelve undergraduate students currently taking degree programs at one EMI university in Kazakhstan agreed to participate in

the study. All the students took a Kazakh language course as part of their curriculum. The participants' profiles and background information are presented in **Table 1**.

We acknowledge limitations related to a sample size and potential biases in self-reported data. However, it is worth noting that similar studies in this field have often employed small or comparable sample sizes[25–27], as the primary goal is to gain in-depth insights rather than produce generalizable results.

3.1. Data Collection and Analysis

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative research design to examine factors that facilitate the engagement of international students in learning Kazakh. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each participant. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit data on the participants' beliefs and experiences of learning Kazakh.

The students were provided with detailed information about the research and the aim of the interview, and they were given an opportunity to discuss questions related to the interview prior to the data collection stage. Following this phase, each participant signed an informed consent form before the interview. The interviews were conducted by one of the researchers in English, which was the only shared language between the participants and researchers. All the interviews were recorded with the participants' prior permission and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed interview data were analyzed using a thematic approach[28].

The interview data were coded and categorized into themes employing the framework of the facilitative learner mindset[15] to examine the students' LOTE engagement. While this framework provided a conceptual lens for interpreting the data, the process of coding and theme identification was also guided by established practices in qualitative research, such as those outlined by Braun and Clarke[28] in their approach to thematic analysis. Following their six-step process, we systematically familiarized ourselves with the data, generated initial codes, searched for themes, reviewed those themes, and defined and named them to address the research question of the study. For example, the theme of "ownership and grit" emerged through repeated references in the data to students taking personal responsibility for their language learning progress despite external difficulties. One participant noted, "I have to make it work, even when it

Table 1. Research participants' profiles and background information.

Participant	Gender	Age	Country of Origin	First Language	Major	Time Spent in Kazakhstan
1	Female	16	Malawi	English	Chemistry & Biology	8 months
2	Female	21	Tanzania	English	Computer Science	2 years
3	Male	17	Malawi	Chichewa	Economics	8 months
4	Male	22	Tanzania	Swahili	Physics & Informatics	7 months
5	Male	19	Malawi	Chichewa	Chemistry & Biology	9 months
6	Female	18	Tajikistan	Tajik	Chemistry & Biology	8 months
7	Female	20	Kenya	English	Chemistry & Biology	9 months
8	Female	18	Tajikistan	Tajik	Chemistry & Biology	8 months
9	Female	17	Tajikistan	Tajik	Chemistry & Biology	8 months
10	Female	18	Kyrgyzstan	Kyrgyz	Physics & Informatics	8 months
11	Female	18	Tajikistan	Tajik	Physics & Informatics	1 year
12	Female	17	Mongolia	Mongolian	Management	2 years

feels overwhelming" (excerpt 31), which strongly pointed toward personal ownership. Similarly, the theme of "supportive learning environment" emerged from frequent mentions of students' reliance on external support, as one participant shared, "The teacher's encouragement made me feel like I could actually succeed in learning Kazakh" (excerpt 31). Such examples demonstrate how data were distilled into themes in alignment with the conceptual framework.

The themes were selected not only because they were frequent but also because they resonated with the core aspects of engagement as theorized by Mercer and Dörnyei[15], particularly around learner agency, motivation, and the emotional aspects of language learning. For instance, the theme "ownership and grit" was not just frequently mentioned by participants, but it also represented a deeper engagement with language learning, showing how learners took control of their progress despite challenges. The criterion for judging—whether data was relevant enough to be considered a theme—involved the degree to which they illuminated key aspects of the facilitative learner mindset. Data that reflected a clear connection to learners' self-perceptions, agency, and emotional engagement with Kazakh learning were given more weight.

Additionally, we referred to other studies, such as Dörnyei[29] on language learner motivation and Lamb's[30] work on learner autonomy, which informed our understanding of how themes in learner engagement could be meaningfully categorized and interpreted. This ensured that the themes were not just context-specific but also theoretically grounded.

While we acknowledge that some themes might seem intuitive, we would argue that this does not diminish their originality or importance. Mercer[25] and subsequent scholars[26, 29, 30] have noted that core elements of learner engagement, such as proactiveness and competence, often appear in different contexts because they are fundamental to learning. However, the way these elements manifest in international students learning Kazakh as a LOTE is what adds originality to the study. For example, "supportive learning environment" may seem predictable, but its specific role in this unique context—where students often navigate unfamiliar linguistic and cultural landscapes—provides valuable insight that could inform pedagogical approaches for other LOTE programs. Additionally, the focus on Kazakh as a lesser-taught language adds a layer of complexity to understanding how these themes play out. Thus, while the themes may appear intuitive, their theoretical grounding and context-specific interpretation add both originality and depth to the analysis.

4. Results

The interview data analysis revealed the following themes in relation to the research question: 1) a sense of competence and growth mindset, 2) ownership and grit, 3) proactiveness, and 4) supportive learning environment.

4.1. A Sense of Competence and Growth Mindset

The participants reported a sense of competence and confidence in their learning abilities of the Kazakh language.

Now our level is good, we are learning it too. It's good, I can understand, I can speak. (ex-

cerpt 1)

I believe my Kazakh level has really increased. As of right now, speaking is my only problem, but then understanding, I can understand Kazakh. (excerpt 2)

I feel like my progress is good because I can make sentences and people can understand me Kazakh. (excerpt 3)

As seen in the above quotes, the participants expressed confidence in their Kazakh language skills, highlighting how they have improved their level of language proficiency.

Apart from the sense of competence, the students also shared positive attitudes toward learning Kazakh and believed in their ability to learn and improve their language skills, thus demonstrating their growth mindset.

Now that I'm learning Kazakh, it's kind of helping me because, even if my Kazakh is not very good, whenever I say something, they can get what I'm trying to say. Sometimes I just translate from English to Kazakh, I read, I tell them oh bro I'm trying to say this so that we can easily communicate. Now, it's good. (excerpt 4)

Of course, it is hard to understand them sometimes. But it's okay because by time I will get used to this language. (excerpt 5)

All the participants agreed that their language learning abilities can be developed through effort and practice, which helps them embrace language and communication challenges.

I try to learn the languages, and I try to speak with them, even if I don't know the word. (excerpt 6)

I tell them to speak slowly so that I understand the tiny bits of words. For example, they speak a whole sentence and I understand one thing and it's always a verb. I translate the whole sentence with that one verb. (excerpt 7)

With group work activity, I said I can speak a little bit Kazakh, so I mix with them and I try to, like, understand. I try to, like, tell them to understand what I'm saying. (excerpt 8)

Firstly, when I came here, I made sure that I had conversations with my friends in Kazakh even though I didn't understand anything. (excerpt 9)

The participants who believed in their ability to improve over time, despite initial struggles, displayed a growth mindset, which is central to Dweck's[16] framework. The above-reported evidence indicates how the students' sense of competence and growth mindset are related to each other. The students who believe they can improve their language learning skills demonstrate a growth mindset and seem to feel more competent since they experience progress, which reinforces their sense of competence.

4.2. Ownership and Grit

All the students reported a strong sense of ownership over their learning, taking personal responsibility for their progress and investing time and effort in the success of their learning.

I have Kazakh friends and the language barrier was the problem. Then I was like, "How do I fix the language barrier? Let me just learn қазақ тілі" (*Kazakh language*). So as an international student, I just had to learn the Kazakh language. (excerpt 10)

I learned Kazakh for myself, first of all. Then I learned Kazakh for this country, for my roommates, and for communication. (excerpt 11)

According to the data analysis, the students took ownership over their progress both in academic and social settings.

Every day when I was going to the university I'd ask my friends қалайсың (*how are you?*), how their day was, they asked me back and we kept doing this as the semester went on. (excerpt 12)

When I want to select something, for example, I want to select fruits or buy картоп (*potato*), I'll be like, "Бұл не?" (*What is this*?) and they'll tell me "This is this, this is that." For the numbers as well, when I want to pay for something, they'll say the number in Kazakh and I'll repeat and ask how much the change is. (excerpt 13)

My roommate was Kazakh, and I started talking Kazakh with her. That, I say, communication is so much better. Other things are also about, like, film, movie, like, we watch this, or, like, if there's some event, we will go there, and they have, like, movie time in Kazakh sometimes. It's good. (excerpt 14)

…my classmates, like, I speak Kazakh with them. (excerpt 15)

The participants also showed grit by continuing to practice speaking Kazakh despite initial difficulties in communication.

I can't speak with the full sentence in Kazakh, but just mixed with English, so my friends, they know what, they just, they understand me. (excerpt 16)

[if it's too difficult] I usually use Google Translate. Or I ask for hand signs, at least, you know. (excerpt 17)

The theme of grit was closely tied to the participants' ability to persevere through the challenges of learning Kazakh in a predominantly English/Russian-speaking environment. As one student explained, "I struggled, but I knew I had to keep pushing myself" (excerpt 33). This perseverance resonates with Mercer[13], who emphasizes the importance of resilience and effort. Similarly, regarding the theme of ownership and linked to how students took responsibility for their own learning by finding additional resources and creating self-study plans, Mercer[13] highlights that learner autonomy is a key component of a facilitative mindset, as ownership over one's learning promotes sustained engagement and proactive behavior.

4.3. Proactiveness

The students' proactiveness appeared salient in all the interviews. The participants reported setting their own goals, selecting learning materials independently, and searching for opportunities to practice their language learning skills in various out-of-class activities.

I noticed that most of my conversations with my friends are usually about where I'm from, my introductions and what I do, so I memorized what I have to say and I also memorized the questions they ask so it's easier for me to understand. (excerpt 18)

So, I get to learn through the things, or passing through some materials, books, like that. For example, I decide for myself, now I'm going to a certain place. For example, maybe, let's take an example, I'm going to a market. So, I'm just finding a few words, I'm trying to learn, that I will use in the market. And those words will help me to get a certain service. So, only that, it's enough. Because when you speak, they understand. So, I just speak those, because now I know how to pronounce. So, if I speak this, they know, this guy needs this. (excerpt 19)

To me, actually, to learn Kazakh, sometimes I used to go, for example, outside maybe to a restaurant or market like that. So, I try to speak what I've learned from the class. And if I'm wrong, those people can speak correctly. So, it's the easiest way to get what I need. Sometimes I speak to my friends, and try to give them greetings in the Kazakh language. (excerpt 20)

The data analysis also revealed that students were proactive in their use of technologies to facilitate their learning of the Kazakh language.

I watched on You Tube a karaoke about some Kazakh music which I found interesting, I wrote the lyrics and then translated them. (excerpt 21)

Video is good. I love to watch because I will memorize, like, you know, I fix that moment in my mind and I will remember it like this through videos. It's better for me through videos. (excerpt 22)

So the way I learned my Kazakh by watching the videos, sometimes we sing some karaoke, you know, so it's really interesting. Hence, I love the language and I'm eager to learn it more. (excerpt 23)

4.4. Supportive Learning Environment

Besides the students' internal psychological constructs, the participants also shared that teachers' and peer support, use of technology in class, and interesting classes contributed to their positive LOTE learning experience.

Thanks to Kazakh classes, I learned new vocabulary. I can understand many more things because of that vocabulary. (excerpt 24)

…and they know that I'm from Mongolia, and they know that I can speak in Kazakh, they all, they all classmates helped me, even my teachers, they helped me, yes. (excerpt 25)

Our мұғалім (*teacher*) is really good. She makes sure that as internationals we understand everything. She translates everything and it's very easy, she makes it very enjoyable, very қызық (*interesting*) and I became very interested in learning the Kazakh language. (excerpt 26)

One of my favourite Kazakh lessons was about numbers because it's similar to Turkish and I learned Turkish. The thing we did was the teacher told us to write from one to fifty Kazakh words that we know. And I was like, "Oh, let me just write numbers" and I wrote numbers from one to fifty and then she wrote different numbers on the board, like one million, two million, etc. Then, students would go to the board and write as well. The second one

was "My family." Everyone individually had to describe their families. Our teacher usually tells us to share our stories in groups or pairs. For example, I talk about my friends and my family and then others do the same. It was very interesting because my friend's family was big and mine was small and it's very interesting to share different experiences. (excerpt 27)

The students also reported that the video-based teaching materials used in class made their learning more engaging and effective.

The teacher puts those videos in the class. They are good. First, they explain something, then we watch, then they do kind of tests at the end, so we can answer them. I think this method is better. With watching videos, putting some clips makes it more interesting. (excerpt 28)

The videos are better because it's graphic, they stay in our minds [longer]. Of course, the textbooks also have photos, but the videos are easier to watch and they are shorter, you can cover a lot in a short time. (excerpt 29)

I find the videos very interesting because sometimes in class, we can sing Kazakh songs, or sometimes watch Kazakh dramas with English subtitles. They're interesting. I enjoy it. (excerpt 30)

The participants in this study were international students learning Kazakh as a LOTE at an EMI university. While their coursework was primarily in English, Kazakh was taught in a multilingual setting. Many participants noted the lack of Kazakh usage outside the classroom, which posed a challenge in practicing the language. However, they also highlighted how the supportive environment helped compensate for this limitation, which aligns with previous research [26, 30] showing the critical role of learning environments in influencing learner engagement. This combination of limited exposure and institutional support systems shaped their need to develop personal agency, grit, and ownership in their learning process.

5. Discussion

The present research explores the factors that aid international students in learning Kazakh as a LOTE at an EMI university in Kazakhstan. The findings reveal that such internal psychological constructs as a growth mindset, sense of competence, grit, proactiveness, ownership, and an external supportive learning environment are important in fostering successful language acquisition.

The findings suggest that learners that demonstrate a growth mindset think they can improve their Kazakh learning skills by working hard and being dedicated. This idea encourages tenacity and perseverance, which are essential for learning a foreign language like Kazakh. This is corroborated by the research by Mercer and Ryan[31], which showed that students who have a growth mindset are more inclined to welcome challenges and persevere through setbacks, which results in higher accomplishment levels in language learning.

Another construct related to a growth mindset is the sense of competence, which also boosts learners' confidence and motivation. Mercer and Dörnyei[15] emphasize that learners who feel competent are more motivated to engage in and sustain learning activities. As the evidence of this research shows, the students' belief in their competence helps them engage in both academic and social settings. The data also demonstrate that growth mindset and sense of competence help the students build confidence and sustain engagement to learn Kazakh as a LOTE.

The participants reported that learning a complex language like Kazakh requires significant effort. The interview data indicate that grit and ownership enable the learners to maintain their efforts despite difficulties. In this regard, Duckworth and Quinn[32] found that grittier individuals are more likely to succeed in demanding endeavors, including language acquisition. Furthermore, when students take ownership of their learning, they are more motivated and invested in the process[6, 33]. In another research[34] on international students' learning experiences of Japanese as a LOTE, the findings also demonstrate that students' intrinsic orientations towards learning a LOTE contribute to more a positive and successful learning of a LOTE.

The evidence of this study also suggests that the students proactively seek out opportunities to practice Kazakh and use the available resources, which includes engaging with other Kazakh speakers. According to the data, proac-tiveness enables the participants to take control of their learning process. Similar results were also reported in the previous research on international students' experiences in Kazakhstan[35], which revealed that the international students actively employed their agency to negotiate their studying in Kazakhstan. In accordance with Deci and Ryan's[14] self-determination theory, students' learner agency is crucial to get over the language-related challenges they face.

It is also apparent from the analysis that a supportive learning environment is indispensable for language learning. For international students, a supportive environment that includes accessible resources, teachers' support, engaging language classes, and a sense of community can significantly enhance their learning experience. Other studies[25, 26, 36] also highlight that a supportive environment fosters motivation and engagement in language learners. In the context of Kazakhstani higher education, accessible digital platforms as part of a supportive learning environment can enhance students' foreign language learning experiences[37].

Based on the data analysis, it could be argued that all the elements of a facilitative learner mindset play equally important and interconnected roles in aiding international students in learning Kazakh as a LOTE at an EMI university in Kazakhstan. None of these elements can be regarded as more crucial than the others, as they collectively form a holistic system that enables learners to overcome challenges, stay motivated, and take ownership of their learning. For instance, a student might develop grit[17], but without a supportive learning environment to encourage perseverance, that grit may not lead to effective learning outcomes. Similarly, ownership and a sense of autonomy are central to student engagement, but they must be paired with a growth mindset[16] to help learners believe in their ability to improve over time. These elements are not isolated; instead, they reinforce each other, forming a comprehensive framework that supports sustainable engagement. In this research, the participants often mentioned multiple factors simultaneously when describing what helped them engage in learning Kazakh. Therefore, the power of the facilitative learner mindset lies in the interplay of its components, all of which are equally essential in fostering engagement in language learning.

Overall, the findings of this research extend the existing literature on LOTE and international student mobility with an evidence-based understanding of international stu-

dents' LOTE learning beliefs with individual–psychological perspectives on engagement with LOTEs.

A few implications emerge from this research. In an era of increasing internalisation of higher education, the insights gained from this study on international students' engagement in learning the host country's language can inform policy-makers and curriculum designers about the important factors that can facilitate successful language learning. If curricula incorporate input for an explicit instruction of the facilitative learner mindset elements (growth mindset, self-competence, proactiveness, ownership, and grit), it is likely to contribute to more effective LOTE programs. Educators can encourage independent learning strategies, such as goal setting, self-assessment, and reflective learning practices. For example, a teacher could implement language learning portfolios where students regularly reflect on their progress, challenges, and strategies for overcoming difficulties, as seen in programs that emphasize learner autonomy[30].

It is also important that LOTE teachers are equipped with necessary competences to create a supportive learning environment which includes accessible resources, teachers' support, engaging language classes and building a sense of community in class. For instance, language tutoring, peer study groups, or language exchanges with native speakers can be set up to provide the scaffolding that helps learners stay engaged. As participants in the study highlighted the importance of feedback and encouragement from instructors, educators in other contexts could implement regular, formative feedback sessions, fostering a sense of progress and competence. Additionally, providing resources such as online language-learning platforms or mobile apps can give students tools to engage with the language outside of the classroom.

6. Conclusions

This research on international students' engagement in learning Kazakh as a LOTE emphasizes significant roles that LOTE languages play in addressing the global dominance of English and supporting a more inclusive and diverse educational landscape of higher education internationalization. The dominance of English in internationalization processes can lead to the loss of linguistic diversity. Our study is an attempt to reverse this trend and promote multilingualism,

which is crucial for cross-cultural understanding and global competence in higher education[38].

The empirical evidence of this study provides valuable insights to enhance LOTE research and practices. The results suggest that international students' engagement with learning Kazakh as a LOTE has a multifaceted nature characterized by interconnected internal and external factors. Students are not only internally engaged with learning Kazakh through a sense of competence, a growth mindset, proactiveness, ownership, and grit, but also possess a socially driven sense of motivation to integrate with peers and local community. Taken together, this evidence offers insights into successful language learning practices and the psychological factors supporting LOTE acquisition. These insights can be applied to other LOTE contexts, offering a broader theoretical framework for understanding language acquisition in diverse linguistic settings[15].

The limitations of this research include the self-reported nature of the data and the single institution research site. However, given the exploratory nature, we believe that this study yielded insightful results that could be a starting point for further research. One such promising area is to examine the link between the self-reported data and LOTE learners' actual linguistic competence using a range of methodological tools. For instance, combining self-reports with language proficiency tests would provide a more accurate understanding of learners' actual abilities. Classroom observations could be used to gauge students' engagement in real-time, offering an external perspective to complement the self-reports. Furthermore, language diaries or learning logs could serve as a tool to capture more immediate reflections from learners, reducing the reliance on retrospective recall. Additionally, it would be interesting to investigate a longer-term impact of LOTE learning on internationalization landscape of higher education through longitudinal studies on LOTE engagement or comparative studies across different LOTEs and further developing applied research that promotes multilingualism in higher education.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, supervision, review and editing—R.A., G.Z.; project administration, funding acquisition—R.A.; methodology, investigation, writing—G.Z.; resources,

data curation, preliminary analysis—D.M.

Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the British Association for Applied Linguistics.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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