



# Students' perceptions of teaching and learning process within trilingual educational programs of study in one Kazakhstani state university

Mariya Bekova

MA in Multilingual Education

GSE, Nazarbayev University

# Research problem

- The appearance of the trilingual programs was very spontaneous with no clear view except the focus fixed on STEM.
- Despite the programs' launching, it is still unclear how the teaching should be conducted and how students actually learn within the trilingual programs.
- Except government documents, there is almost no empirical-based studies about trilingual education at university level.

**THE PURPOSE** of the study is to explore the perceptions of university students on teaching and learning process within trilingual educational programs in one Kazakhstani university

**RQ 1**: How do students perceive teaching and learning process within trilingual educational programs?

**RQ 2**: What challenges do students encounter while studying within trilingual educational programs?

# Literature Review: key concepts

## The concept of perceptions

(Angell, 1906; Goldstein, 2013; Griggs, 2010; Lowe, 1993; Pickens, 2005; Smythies & Ramachandran, 1997)

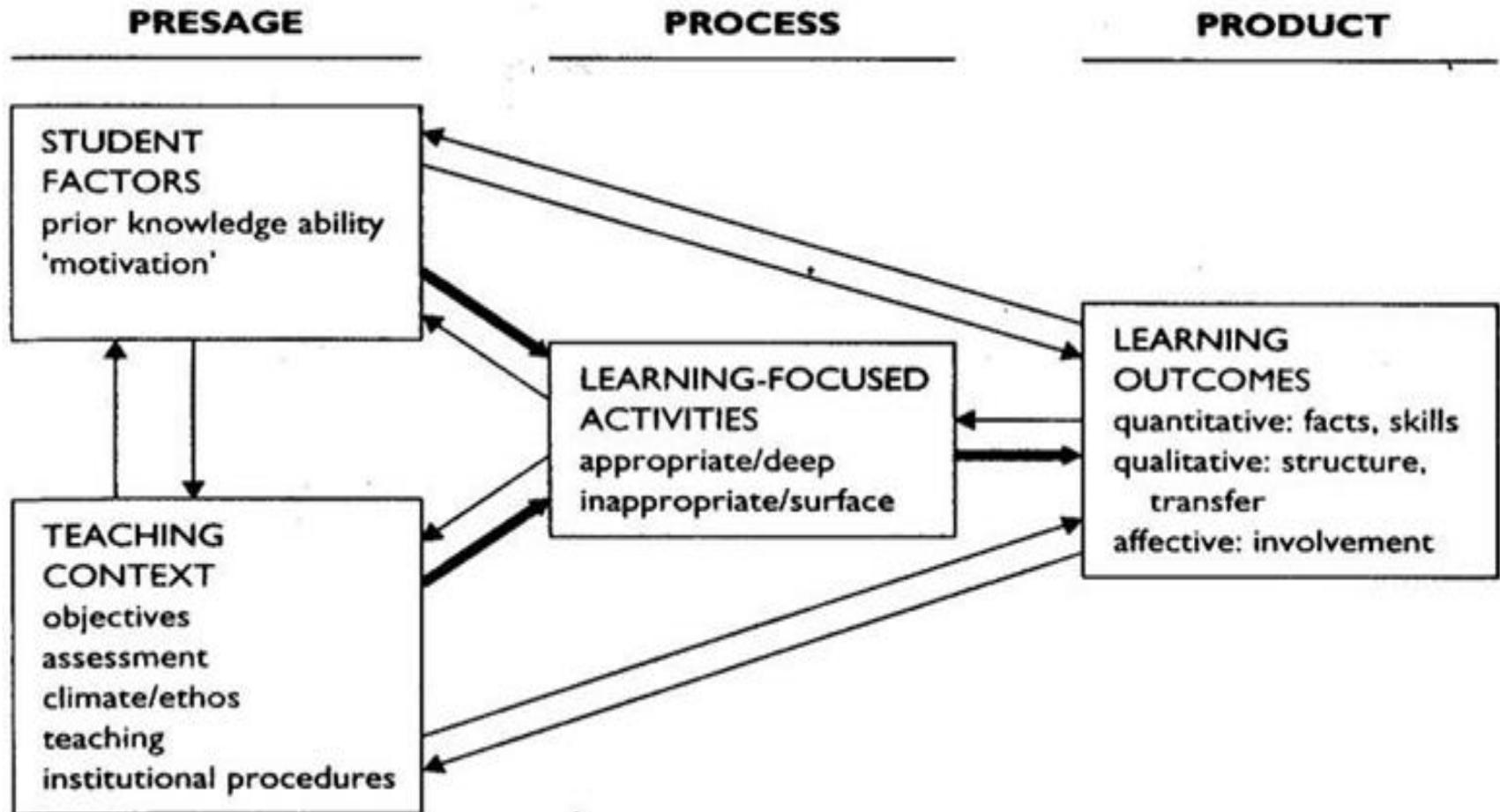
- Perception is a process that makes sensory patterns meaningful. It is perception that makes these words meaningful, rather than just a string of visual patterns. To make this happen, perception draws heavily on memory, motivation, emotion, and other psychological processes. (Griggs, 2010, p. 5)

## The concepts of bi/tri/multilingual education

(Abello-Contesse, 2013; Baker & Sienkewicz, 2005; Cenoz, 2012; Garcia, 2011; Henn-Reinke, 2012; Hornberger, 2009; Jha, 2013; Lasagabaster, 2015; Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003; UNESCO experts, 2003; Wright, Boun, & Garcia, 2015)

- Multilingual education is, at its best, (1) multilingual in that it uses and values more than one language in teaching and learning, (2) intercultural in that it recognizes and values understanding and dialogue across different lived experiences and cultural worldviews, and (3) education that draws out, taking as its starting point the knowledge students bring to the classroom and moving toward their participation as full and indispensable actors in society – locally, nationally, and globally. (Hornberger, 2009, p. 198)

# Conceptual framework: Biggs's 3P teaching and learning model



# Literature review

## Teaching and Learning Process within Multilingual Education: International experience

### Students' general perceptions of multilingual education

Cenoz & Etxague, 2013; González Ardeo, 2014; Housen, 2002; Kiss, 2009; Lindholm-Leary, 2016; Lee & Jeong, 2013; Oltean, 2009;

### Teaching and learning process within multilingual education

#### *Students' factor: motivation in multilingual education*

Lasagabaster, 2011; Ortega, 2009; Reinvere & Raud, 2009;

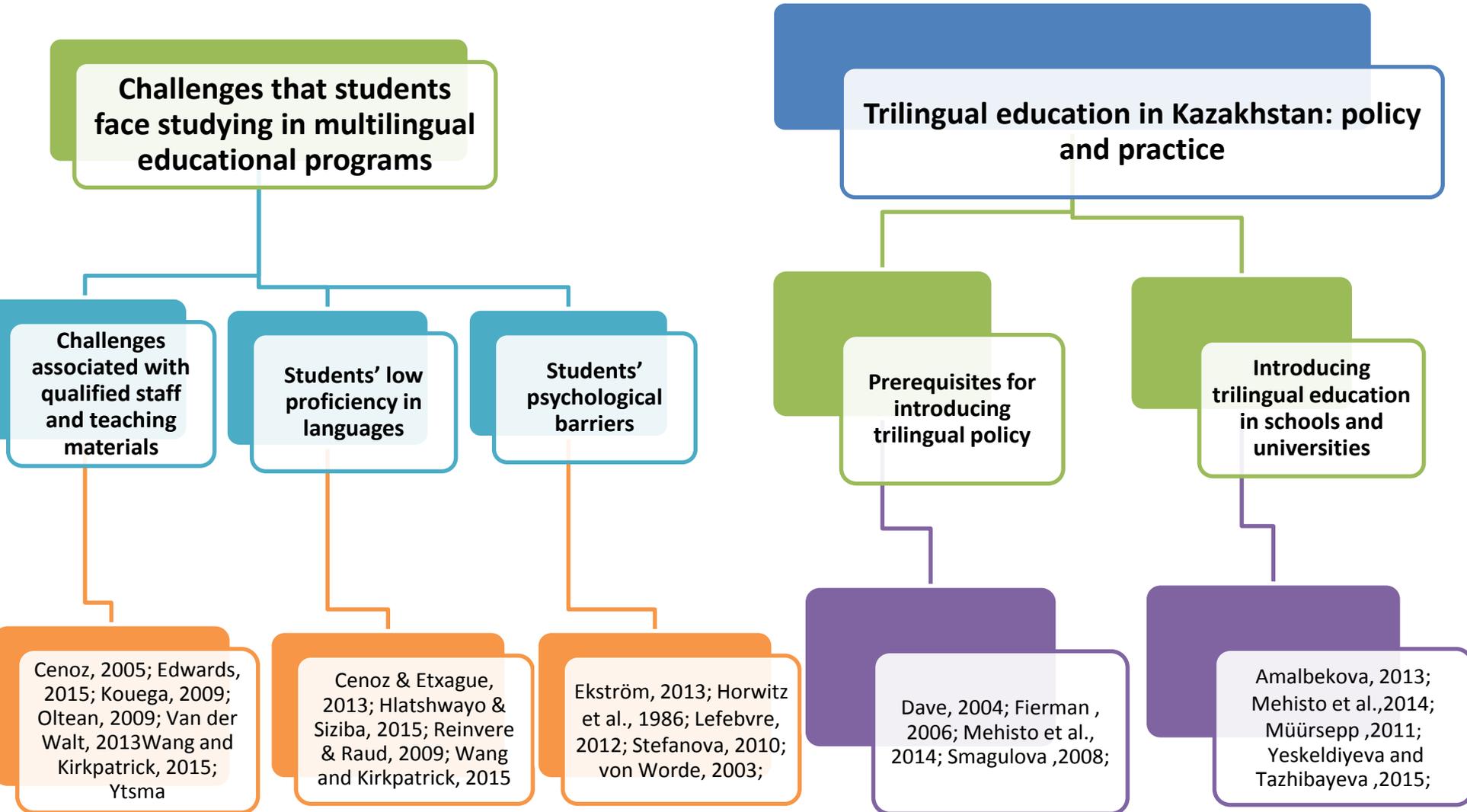
#### *Students' code-switching in classrooms*

Cenoz and Etxague, 2013; Cleghorn, 1992; Cook, 2001; Huerta-Macías & Quintero, 1992; Mokgwathi & Webb, 2013; Pollard, 2002; Van der Walt, 2013; Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2013

#### *Teaching approaches and strategies*

Faltis, 1996; Met, 1994

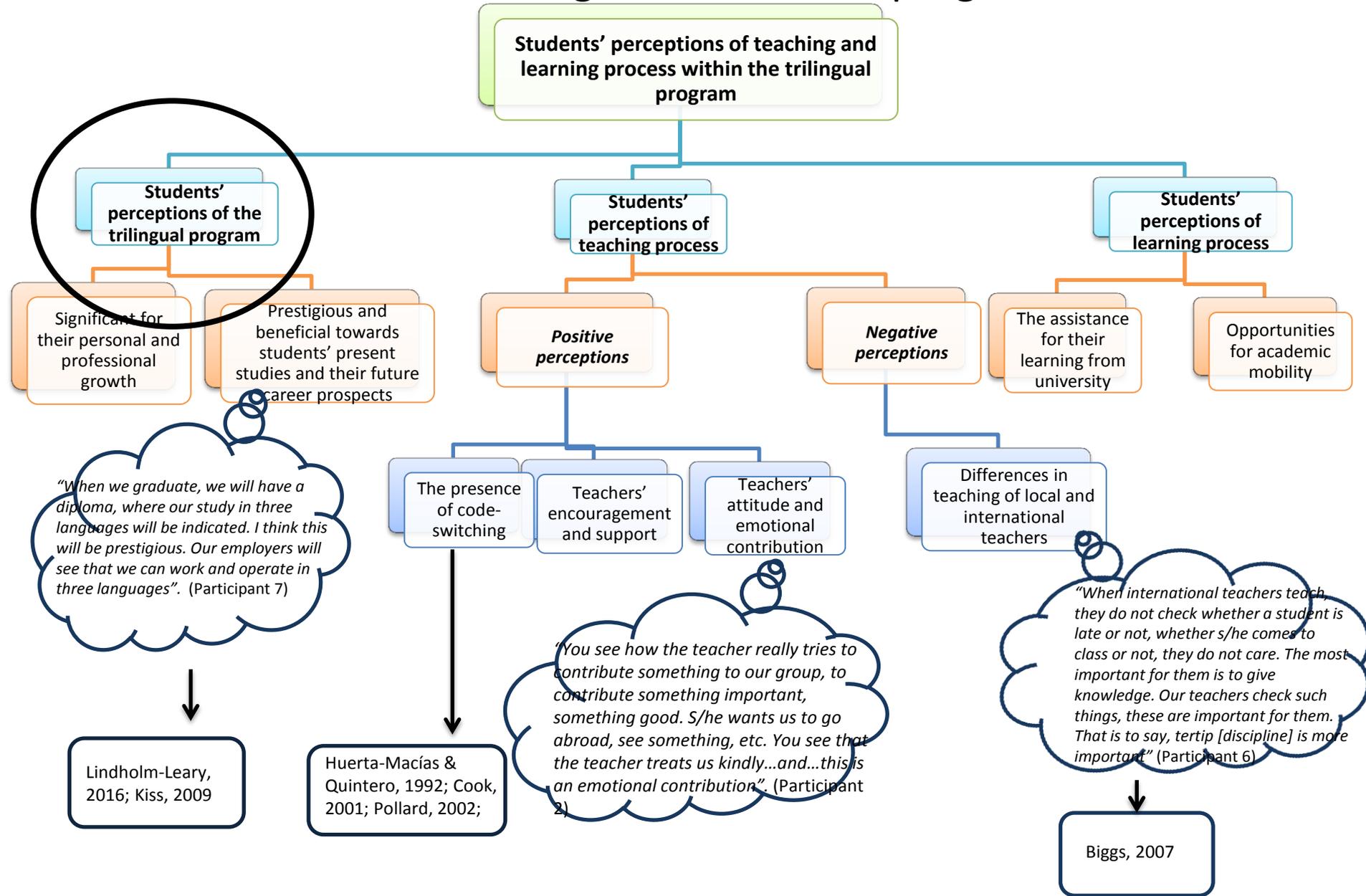
# Literature Review



# Methodology

- **Research approach**: an interview-based inquiry research design
- **Sample**: a purposeful convenience sampling
  - ✓ ***Participants***: 10 third-year students majoring in engineering (5) and food industry (5)
  - ✓ ***Site***: one state university which has trilingual programs in engineering, agricultural sciences, and food industry in Astana
- **Instrument**: one-on-one semi-structured interviews (1 interview  $\approx$  30-40 min)
- **Data analysis**: transcripts, coding, categories
- **Ethical considerations**: ethics form, informed consent forms

# RQ1: How do students perceive teaching and learning processes within the trilingual educational programs?



# RQ1: How do students perceive teaching and learning processes within the trilingual educational programs?

Students' perceptions of the trilingual program

Significant for their personal and professional growth

Prestigious and beneficial towards students' present studies and their future career prospects

Kiss, 2009;  
Lindholm-Leary, 2016;

*"When we graduate, we will have a diploma, where our study in three languages will be indicated. I think this will be prestigious. Our employers will see that we can work and operate in three languages".*  
(Participant 7)

# RQ1: How do students perceive teaching and learning processes within the trilingual educational programs?

Students' perceptions of teaching and learning process within the trilingual program

Students' perceptions of the trilingual program

Significant for their personal and professional growth

Prestigious and beneficial towards students' present studies and their future career prospects

"When we graduate, we will have a diploma, where our study in three languages will be indicated. I think this will be prestigious. Our employers will see that we can work and operate in three languages". (Participant 7)

Lindholm-Leary, 2016; Kiss, 2009

Students' perceptions of teaching process

Positive perceptions

The presence of code-switching

Teachers' encouragement and support

Teachers' attitude and emotional contribution

"You see how the teacher really tries to contribute something to our group, to contribute something important, something good. S/he wants us to go abroad, see something, etc. You see that the teacher treats us kindly...and...this is an emotional contribution". (Participant 2)

Huerta-Macías & Quintero, 1992; Cook, 2001; Pollard, 2002;

Negative perceptions

Differences in teaching of local and international teachers

"When international teachers teach, they do not check whether a student is late or not, whether s/he comes to class or not, they do not care. The most important for them is to give knowledge. Our teachers check such things, these are important for them. That is to say, tertip [discipline] is more important". (Participant 6)

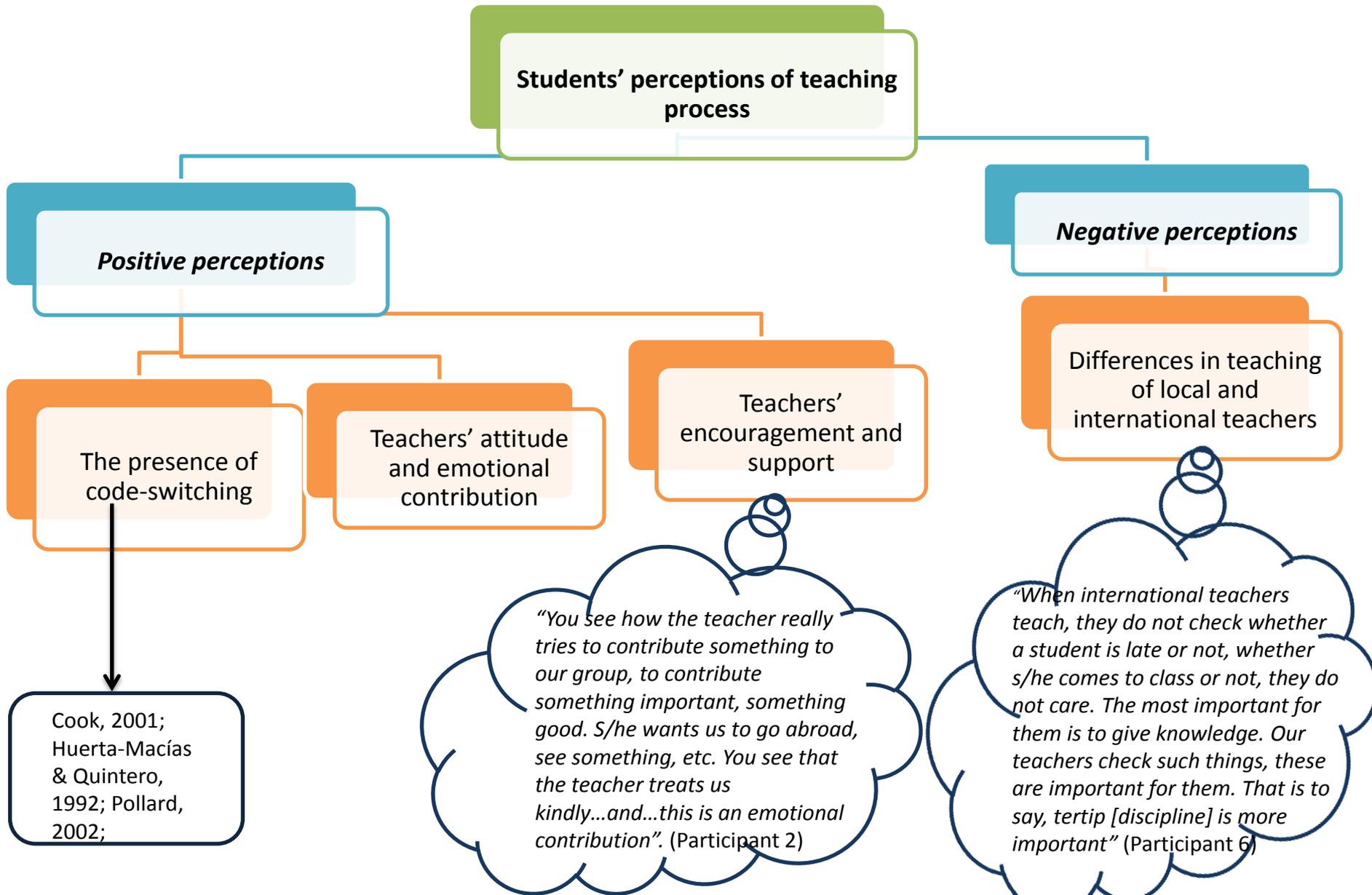
Biggs, 2007

Students' perceptions of learning process

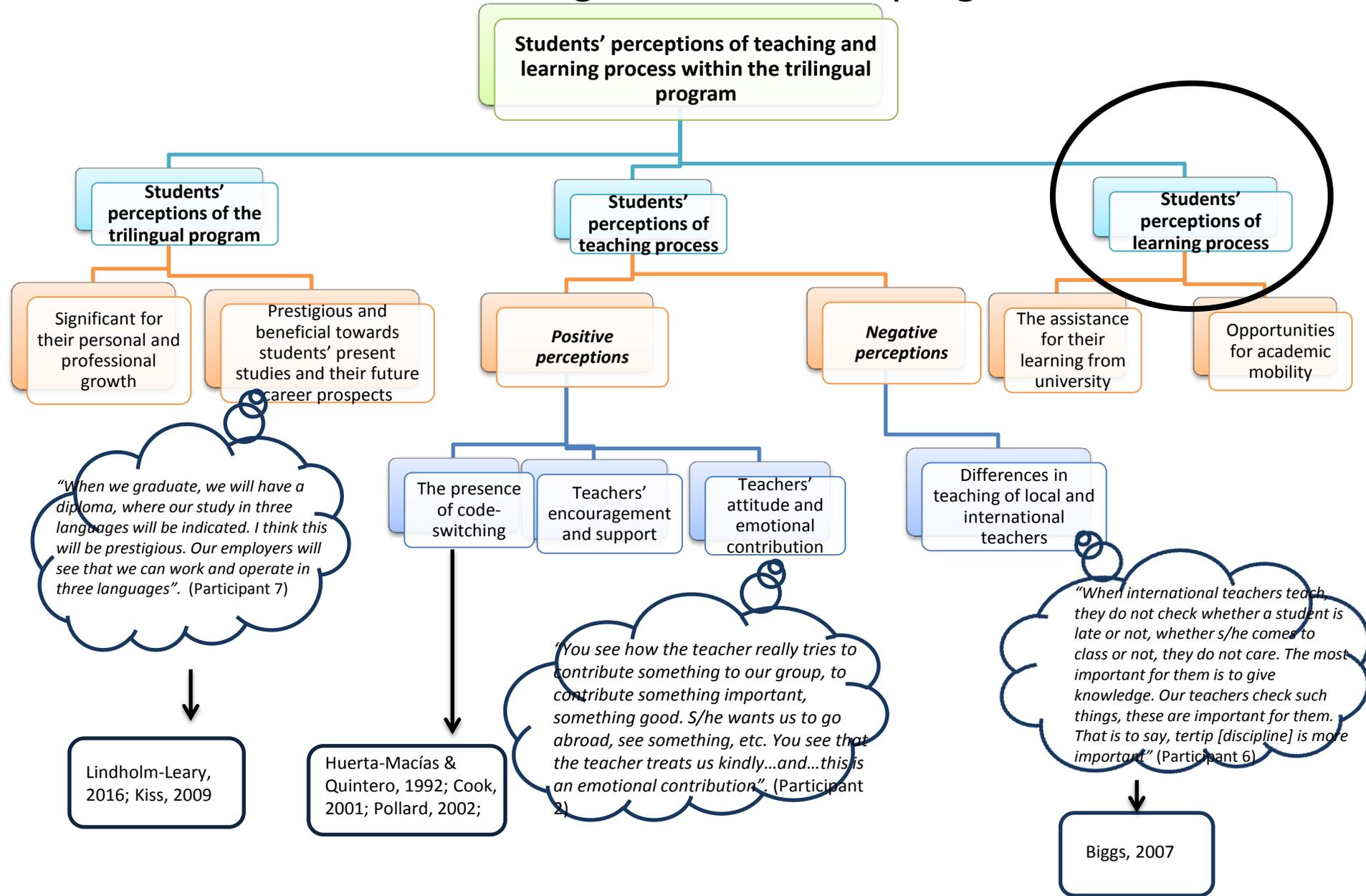
The assistance for their learning from university

Opportunities for academic mobility

# RQ1: How do students perceive teaching and learning processes within the trilingual educational programs?



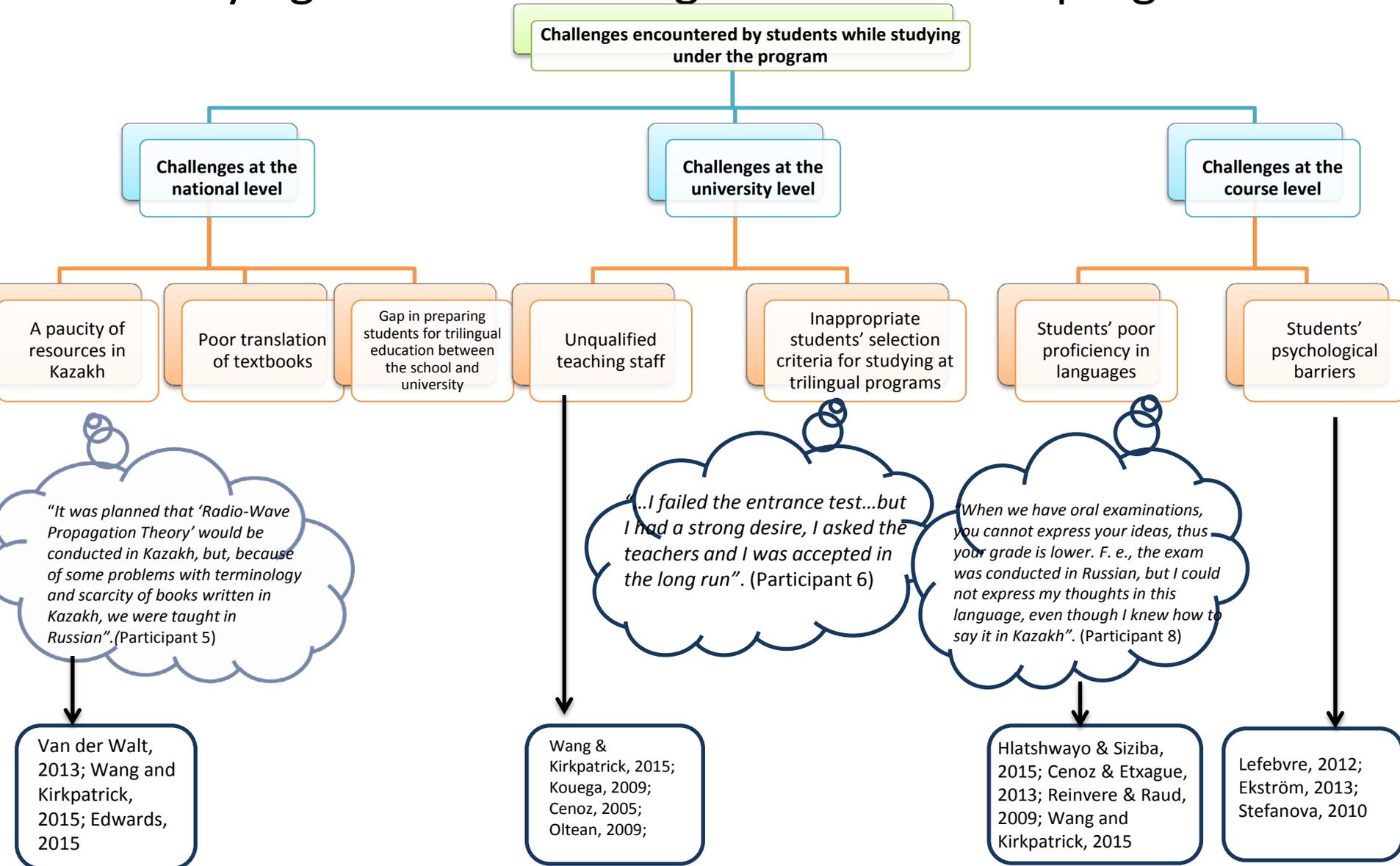
# RQ1: How do students perceive teaching and learning processes within the trilingual educational programs?



# Findings to RQ1

1. The students perceive trilingual programs as significant and beneficial for them as the future professionals. As the participants also reported, prestigious status of the programs, future opportunities, and open access to international experience are found among the main benefits of studying in the trilingual programs.
2. The participants' perceptions of the teaching process are found to be positive as well as negative, with the former implying code-switching, teachers' encouragement along with their attitude and emotional contribution, and the latter highlighting their negative perceptions of local staff's traditional teaching approaches against more advanced approaches of the international faculty.
3. Learning process is characterized as mostly enjoyable by the interviewees. The students found the opportunities for academic mobility and the support provided by the university, teachers, and group mates are the components that make the learning process enjoyable and pleasant.

# RQ2: What challenges do students encounter while studying within the trilingual educational programs?



# Findings to RQ 2

1. The students perceive a limited range of literature in the Kazakh language, poor translation of textbooks, and the absence of preparatory courses for students to study in trilingual programs as the challenging issues at the national level, meaning their solution requires the intervention of national authority.
2. Among challenges found at the university level, the students point out teachers' low language proficiency and inappropriate students' selection criteria for studying at trilingual programs as being acute and pressing problems.
3. Students' low proficiency in language(s) was found as an acute problem among the participants. Several psychological barriers such as fear of making mistakes, shyness in speaking, and jealousy to other better speaking group mates also hamper their development.

# Conclusion

- Findings to RQ 1 showed students' positive perceptions of trilingual programs in general, which means that overall the development of the programs is on a good path. If learning process students perceive as mostly enjoyable, in teaching they highlight positive and negative points, where the former indicates teachers' encouragement and support and the latter implies the discrepancy in teaching methods of local and international staff. Notwithstanding different teaching trainings, this means that local teachers still are not prepared enough to teach in a trilingual setting.
- Findings to RQ 2 revealed many challenges found at national, university, and course levels with a paucity of materials in Kazakh, unqualified teaching staff, inappropriate entrance criteria, students' poor language skills and psychological barriers being perceived by the students as main issues in teaching and learning process they confront with. Despite the efforts have been made to implement trilingual programs in universities, the finding showed that the trilingual programs need a serious elaboration. Otherwise, the challenges found are more likely to exert negative influence on students' learning process.

# Limitations and suggestions for further research

- As only one university is involved, the research findings cannot be generalized. *Quantitative research* can show a broader picture of the trilingual programs in other universities
- Only interviews were used. To increase the trustworthiness of the study, observations or other instruments could be added in next research

# References

- Abello-Contesse, C., Chandler, P. M., López-Jiménez, M. D., & Chacón-Beltrán, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Bilingual and multilingual education in the 21st century: Building on experience* (Vol. 94). Multilingual Matters.
- Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2007). Teaching for quality learning at university (Society for research into higher education).
- Beetsma, D. (2002). *Trilingual primary education in Europe*. Fryske Akademie, Ljouwert.
- Cenoz, J. (2009). *Towards multilingual education: Basque educational research from an international perspective* (Vol. 72). Multilingual Matters.
- Dave B. (2004). Entitlement through numbers: nationality and language categories in the first post-Soviet census of Kazakhstan. *Nations and Nationalism*, 10(4), 439-459.
- Education in a multilingual world (2003) Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001297/129728e.pdf>
- Fierman, W. (2006). Language and education in post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Kazakh-medium instruction in urban schools. *The Russian Review*, 65(3), 98-116.
- García, O. (2011). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Lasagabaster, D. (2015). Different educational approaches to bi-or multilingualism and their effect on language attitudes. *In Content-based language learning in multilingual educational environments* (pp. 13-30). Springer International Publishing.
- Lefebvre, E. (2012). *Student Attitudes Toward Multilingual Education*.
- Mehisto, P., Kambatyrova, A., & Nurseitova, K. (2014). Three in One? Trilingualism in Policy and Educational Practice. In D. Bridges (Ed.). *Educational reform and Internationalisation. The case of School Reform in Kazakhstan* (pp. 152-177). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press