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## **MASTER'S THESIS**

### **IMPACT OF EDUCATION LANGUAGE ON SELF-ESTEEM AND SOCIOECONOMIC ASPIRATION**

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### **TƏHSİL DİLİNİN ÖZÜNƏ İNAM VƏ SOSIAL-İQTİSADI HƏDƏFLƏRİ ÜZƏRİNDƏKİ TƏSİRİ**

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## INTRODUCTION

Language, exceeding its communicative function, serves as a powerful vector of social mobility, identity construction, and institutional stratification. Educational settings that utilize multiple languages create invisible advantages and disadvantages which affect student learning opportunities. The unique linguistic heritage of Soviet Azerbaijan allows researchers to explore how different instructional languages (Azerbaijani, Russian, English) influence students' psychological development specifically regarding their self-perception and future goals.

**Significance and Relevance of the Study.** Despite the growing global importance of multilingualism, little attention has been given to its psychological impact in stratified post-Soviet systems. The modern research trend mostly dedicated to development of bilingual cognitive benefits or socioeconomic language skill effects without investigating subtle long-term psychological impacts on adolescent identity formation in hierarchical language environments. Azerbaijan presents a special educational context where Azerbaijani, Russian, and English coexist as mediums of instruction, each associated with different degrees of symbolic and economic power, which cause the situation when students are inevitably socialized into language-linked status categories. The internalized language hierarchies influence how students develop their self-esteem along with their academic motivation and future planning goals (e.g., Delavan et al., 2024, Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, Flores & Rosa, 2015). The study is dedicated to fill this gap and investigates how psychological growth of adolescents - mainly during their secondary education years – is affected by Azerbaijan's uneven language prestige distribution. The research studies student subjective experiences and self-perceptions across language tracks to reveal an important yet understudied aspect of post-Soviet language policy in education.

**Research Objectives and Problem.** The core problem addressed in this study is the unequal psychological development of students caused by the symbolic and socioeconomic stratification of instructional languages. The social hierarchy maintenance through educational institutions has been originally explained by Bourdieu (1991) through his linguistic capital concept. The Azerbaijani educational context is described by Akyıldız (2019) and Abdurahmanova (2023) through their research about how Russian and English language dominance in elite educational tracks leads to social mobility benefits and parental preference which affects students' self-image development and academic goals. Until the modern days, is a critical “lacuna” of research on the psychological effects resulting from this educational

stratification especially regarding adolescent self-esteem together with their perceived academic ability. The research investigates how Azerbaijani secondary school instruction languages affect students' self-esteem and educational ambitions through an analysis of symbolic value and social perception of each language.

**Research Hypothesis.** The primary empirical hypothesis of this study suggests that Azerbaijani secondary students in Russian- and English-medium schools show superior self-esteem and greater educational ambition than those in Azerbaijani-medium schools.

A theoretical hypothesis focuses on the psychological mechanisms mediating this effect, particularly the role of internalized language hierarchies and perceived legitimacy of linguistic identity. Students from environments with lower language prestige experience symbolic marginalization which affects their motivation levels and their future orientation.

A methodological hypothesis examines how cultural and linguistic biases within standardized measurement tools affect psychological assessment accuracy. Given the limited availability of localized and culturally adapted psychological tools in the Azerbaijani context, it is hypothesized that challenges related to validity and contextual adequacy may influence both the reliability of data and the interpretability of psychological constructs such as self-esteem and aspiration across language groups.

**Background of the Study.** Research draws from psychological and sociolinguistic literature especially focusing on multilingual education studies, the concept of symbolic power by Bourdieu and adolescent identity formation (e.g Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Hamman-Ortiz & Palmer, 2020; Khattab, 2015) who demonstrates how language learning settings affect adolescent psychosocial development alongside identity negotiation, and self-esteem. While previous studies highlight that bilingualism provides cognitive advantages, the psychological effects of language-based stratification - especially within post-Soviet in general, and namely Azerbaijani educational system - remain underexplored. The methodological gaps in culturally valid psychological instruments create substantial obstacles for conducting empirical research in Azerbaijan. The absence of localized assessment tools makes it impossible for researchers to measure self-esteem, identity and aspiration across different language groups reliably with required validity. More broadly, research methods in quantitative studies that examine non-Western multilingual contexts need both cultural adaptability and methodological sensitivity in aim to measure social stratification effects on psychology (Hambleton & Zenisky, 2010; Hornberger, 2016).

**Methodological Framework and Methods.** This study combines validated psychological instruments (e.g., the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale) with a localized aspirations survey and language background questionnaire. Due to administrative limitations and access issues, the design was adapted into a pilot format with the emphasis on critical theoretical, methodological and practical interpretation. Methodological reflection was used to address cultural and contextual validity during multilingual psychological assessment.

The significant lack of culturally validated psychological tools for the Azerbaijani sociolinguistic context determined this methodological direction. The study implements an exploratory approach that prioritizes theoretical reflexivity and methodological flexibility.

**Scientific Contribution of the Study.** This research presents the first comprehensive psychological analysis of how instruction language affects teenage self-esteem and aspiration in Azerbaijan. The research contributes theoretically by extending symbolic capital theory through the exploration of adolescent psychological development by analyzing how internal language hierarchies affect self-worth, identity and future orientation during important formative periods. The psychological significance of this research lies in its empirical identification of how language-mediated school environments influence motivational constructs and self-concept in multilingual post-Soviet settings.

In terms of methodological innovation, the study addresses the limitations of standardized Western instruments by proposing a culturally responsive, interpretive framework for measuring self-esteem and aspirations in stratified, linguistically heterogeneous societies. Drawing from the challenges discussed in Chapter II, this research offers a foundation for developing holistic, culturally sensitive, and reflexive methodologies for studying adolescent psychological variables in non-Western areas with socioeconomic diversity and multilingual population, particularly in understudied educational systems of post-Soviet nations.

**Scientific and Practical Significance.** The research findings contain practical implications suggesting specific policy solutions which draw from international models presented in Chapter I, aimed to reduce linguistic stratification-related psychological damage. These recommendations support more equitable language policies in education that consider not only cognitive or economic outcomes, but also the emotional well-being and developmental potential of all students, regardless of their instructional language background. The research establishes a policy-based model for sustainable educational change that puts psychological health as a center of language planning decisions.

The study develops a transferable methodological framework which serves as guidance for further research in multiple post-Soviet and non-Western multilingual environments. The research demonstrates the need to change psychological assessment approaches by using cultural epistemologies which create reflective tools for examining the interplay of language with identity and social stratification. Through its findings the research establishes a more sophisticated global psychology which can properly study adolescent development within environments characterized by linguistic imbalances and unique cultural backgrounds.

**Structure of the Master Thesis.** This thesis is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter explains psychological elements including self-esteem, identity formation and future orientation in relation to multilingual educational settings. The research investigates the psychological effects of language stratification on teenagers worldwide but focuses mainly on the relationship between these effects, socioeconomic status and linguistic characteristics in Azerbaijani society.

The methodological approach described in Chapter II covers instrument cultural adaptation, the standardization limitations of perceived as universal tools, and the need for reflexive practice when working in socioeconomically and linguistically diverse environments. Special attention is given to the psychological validity of self-esteem and aspiration measures across linguistic groups.

Chapter III presents the findings of the pilot study and interprets them through psychological and sociocultural lenses, focusing on how language of instruction impacts students' motivational structures, internalized hierarchies, and emotional adjustment.

The last part of the research presents conclusions together with culturally-based policy recommendations for education along with suggestions for future psychological research.



## **CHAPTER I. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to actualize the problem of multilingualism as a psychologically significant issue (if not saying “critical” in the age of globalism), it is necessary to comprehend the place of the language factor in the holistic system of environmental nurturing and education. Addressing the chosen psychometrics of self-esteem and aspiration, naturally, we cannot consider them as something existing by itself. Statistical data per se is not sufficient material to comprehend the real psychological value of the collected results. Therefore, the metrics of self-esteem mediated by the variable of the language of instruction have been chosen to consider within the framework of the question of self-concept, whereas aspiration indexes as a personal psychological reflection of socioeconomic environment. This section develops the theoretical understanding of the arisen question of self-esteem and aspiration within cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, contributed by global and regional empirical evidence, and experience of successfully implementing to withstand the negative effects of multilingualism politics.

### **1.1. Language as Social Capital and Symbolic Power**

Scoping the issue of both, self-esteem and aspiration, within the linguistical framework, this section will represent the theoretical comprehension of the material and environmental value of language in society. It goes without saying that the perception of potential or current personal success - which determining mentioned psychometrics - is oriented on the socioeconomic background of an individual. As it will be demonstrated, language as a group factor has been proven to be a factor of stratification (e.g., Duchene & Heller, 2012; Piller, 2016). Not all languages are equal in their potential for personal realization (e.g., Bourdieu 1991; Gazzola & Wickström, 2016). In the intention to explore how we can measure the real value of the language, associated with opportunities of speakers, Bourdieu (1991) and following scholars (e.g., Gazzola & Wickström, 2016; Blommaert, 2015) develop the concept of “Symbolic power”, which successfully represents language as a market-oriented resource and perceived personal worth. The comprehension of language solely within its cultural value cannot provide valuable answers for the current research. Nevertheless, due attention to the meaning of language as a vital parameter of self-identification has also been provided in this study.

### 1.1.1. From Bourdieu to Contemporary Critiques

In 1991, Pierre Bourdieu published the work «Language and Symbolic Power», which presented the idea that language can be perceived as a form of capital. He assumed that language is not only a mere tool of communication but also a key phenomenon that reflects and reinforces social hierarchies that we can notice any day in any country. What has been named “linguistic capital” was conceptualized as a form of economic capital that gives an advantage to individuals who speak the elite language valued by institutions and society. It can be especially noticeable in schools, where this capital transforms into better academic performance and greater chances for social and economic mobility. When a specific language or dialect is considered standard or prestigious, speakers of another are predictably often excluded or disadvantaged (Piller, 2016), which causes the phenomenon of linguistic hierarchy per se.

In multilingual communities, the unequal status of languages often contributes to social stratification or might even determine it. Bourdieu attempts to explain how linguistic policies and norms serve the interests of dominant (or privileged) social groups characterized by establishing certain ways of speaking as legitimate while devaluing others. The major principle has not been changed within the historical span and we can apply this framework for different ages, countries, and communities, with due considerations of local specifics and modern theoretical findings. In Azerbaijan, this dynamic is particularly visible in the prioritization of Russian - and increasingly English - as languages of social and economic mobility (Bogdanova, 2022). While Russian has been institutionally supported since the Soviet period, English has largely been popularized by elite private education and international partnerships during the last years, rather than through consistent state policy (Mammadov & Mammadova, 2022; Rzaeva et al., 2020). This suggests that governmental policies are not the only factor of linguistic surrounding shaping, and the perspective of the theory of symbolic capital should be expanded, considering external variables.

The linguistic hierarchy is articulated and reinforced in several – if not saying “any” - domains of public life. For instance, Russian-language schools (also known as Russian-sector) in Azerbaijan have historically attracted students from more urban and economically wealthy backgrounds. And some studies suggest that Russian-sector graduates achieve comparative advantages in accessing higher education and employment opportunities (Abdurahmanova, 2023). However, these findings are highly contextual and should not be overstated, as far as the precise information regarding definitive wage comparisons is absent. While the dynamic of

Russian language prevalence is rather decaying (the percentage of Azerbaijani people speaking Russian decreased by 1% (from 2009 to 2019) (The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan)), English is increasingly becoming more perspective and popular (the population percent speaking English increased on 0.5% among Azerbaijani people (ibid)) language of instruction in elite private schools and international programs, which is accessible only to students from wealthier families. Delavan (2021) conceptualizes this phenomenon further, addressing the “gentrification” in bilingual and dual-language education. Following the general idea of self-reinforcement of socioeconomic stratificational dynamics, the author proclaims that the bilingual education formerly designed to promote linguistic equity may gradually become a de facto exclusive opportunity for middle- and upper-class families. Considering the existing economic census for private schools, which are more likely to be Russian- and English-sectors, we can assume that accessibility for the mentioned languages within the educational system in Azerbaijan may potentially create a self-fulfilling trend of institutionalized stratification.

Official statistical sources such as the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan (SSCA) (2023) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2022) report income variety by profession and education level, but do not directly link them to the language of instruction. Yet, taking into consideration that the language of instruction highly likely mediates academic aspiration and opportunities for socioeconomic realization, the unequal distribution of job titles among employees with different linguistic competencies can be assumed. Future research could help fill this empirical gap and prove this hypothesis, which is essential for modeling the long-term effects of structural inequality caused by the factor of linguistic capital possession.

More recent scholars have adapted Bourdieu’s concept, which reflects the realities of globalized and late capitalist societies. Gazzola & Wickström (2016) develop the concept of linguistic capitalism further to describe how language skills are articulated as marketable assets. Relying on comparative wage and employment data, they demonstrate how knowledge of particular languages can significantly affect economic trajectories, especially in urban labor markets as subjects of bigger influence of capitalistic globalism. In the majority of post-Soviet countries, the value of knowing Russian is being reconsidered due to the growing value of English in international job markets and geopolitical reshaping, motivated by the international and regional crises of 2022 and later. This perspective suggests that language value is shaped not only by national policies but also by global economic trends and international politics.

This market-oriented logic has become more prominent in post-Soviet states, including Azerbaijan, where language skills are actively monetized as a capital of mobility in a highly

stratified society. The perceived economic value of English often seems to outweigh its cultural or historical significance, at least in practical terms for the not natives. However, such monetization does not devalue the symbolic hierarchies implied in language use. The shift from cultural capital to market utility can be seen not as a replacement but as a reshaping of the linguistic value per se, implementing its global economic significance. The symbolic struggles Bourdieu outlined as economic competition, implying that even though not related to the economic capital, the cultural nature of language also becomes part of the market system. That raises another problematic topic – the cultural export mediated by language competence as a part of the holistic system of socioeconomic and cultural opportunities.

The theory of linguistic capital has been greatly extended beyond the framework of Bourdieu in the next century. Duchêne and Heller (2012) re-comprehended the language from the perspective of the dynamic market commodity in the neoliberal logic of governance. Highlighting that language is not solely a factor of belonging to a particular cultural community or socioeconomic strata, but also a personal economic asset. The authors presented an alternative, though not contradictory to the original theory of Bourdieu, approach to understanding the language as a dependent on market dynamics asset. Alike stocks, it can become more or less valuable and in demand. It can be especially noticed in post-Soviet countries like Azerbaijan, where the linguistic asset is especially actualized by the polarization of opportunities related to the particular language, which will be discussed later. As it has been mentioned, every language in such an environment presents nearly exclusive opportunity trajectories, which makes the choice even more important for the person themselves, the political and cultural integrity of the state.

Jan Blommaert (2015) also developed a more flexible and functional understanding of linguistic capital. He underlines that language use today is shaped by mobility, technology, and constantly changing social spaces, making the system of communication dynamic. Naturally, people often switch between languages based on where they are and what they need. This is particularly noticeable in cities in Azerbaijan, where Russian, Azerbaijani, and English are used in different and sometimes competing areas of daily life. Considering this, the comprehension of the language as a hard skill gets volume as highly contextual competence, determined not solely by cultural or economic need, but as a combination of them.

Flores and Rosa (2015), although writing in the U.S. context, add another layer by introducing the idea of raciolinguistic ideologies. They theorized that the value of language is often tied to stereotypes about race and ethnicity. Even if someone speaks the dominant or elite

language fluently, they may still be perceived by others as less competent if they come from a minority background. While this framework originates in contexts where race is a major category of consideration, its application to Azerbaijan (or another highly ethnically homogenous country) requires caution. In the Azerbaijani context, racial hierarchies are less present, but ethnolinguistic and regional divisions may be considered as a potential exclusionary factor, analogous to raciolinguistic ideology. Despite contextual differences, the theoretical lens offered by Flores and Rosa appears to be valuable for revealing how language and social stratification intersect, even by non-intellectual and non-economic factors, such as appearance or accent.

Altogether, these perspectives build on and extend Bourdieu's original theory, making it profound and more applicable. While his ideas remain useful for understanding how language relates to power, newer studies offer a more detailed and adaptable view, which allows us to extend, narrow, personalize, and empirically ground the concept of "power" as intellectual competence, socioeconomic disposition, ethnocultural indexes, and personal perception of environment and opportunities. In countries similar to Azerbaijan, where social change, globalization, and language diversity are all presented as crucial determinants, these insights help comprehend how language policies and everyday practices shape people's perception of opportunities, self-esteem, and aspirations in life.

### **1.1.2. Language Value and Its Influence on Self-Perception and Motivation**

As the institution of primary socialization, along with its educative functions, school also becomes a natural tool for the formulation of the perception of social normality. As long as any education and nurturing are based on the selection of what is appropriate and desirable for internalization, language can be perceived as one of the selected, legitimate assets for children. Bourdieu supports that point (1991), implying that the school system in general can be considered as an institution of the original predisposition of the population to one of the selected sociocultural strata. It goes without saying that in a situation of unequal socioeconomic stratification, the parental choice of school and language of instruction determines a student's position in society, advantageous or disadvantageous.

The educational system of Azerbaijan implements Azerbaijani, Russian, and English as instructional languages at various levels, which demonstrates different social language justifications. Karimova (2017) explains that English has become the preferred language in private universities because it connects students to international opportunities and career advancement. Russian, on the other hand, maintains its influence among urban elite groups who

use it in professional and academic settings (This evidence is rather widely accepted among authors accustomed to the local context, yet empirically has not been proven so far). While these languages are often associated with higher social positioning, such associations are not necessarily grounded in curricular content but rather in broader social perceptions and aspirations. According to Luscombe and Kazdal (2014), instructional language directly influences how students develop their linguistic identity and their sense of school affiliation. The selection of instructional language serves both educational and social identification purposes, which directly affects students' actual and perceived socioeconomic status.

Nevertheless, we cannot fully reject this factor or unequal provision by school resources for the student's qualification, in determined by language directions. Naturally, private English schools are better supplied, especially in the aspect of international experience accessibility, rather than Azerbaijani or Russian schools. Moreover, schools are distributed regionally unequally, and Russian schools, along with English, are significantly more present in the biggest cities, whereas the rest regions of Azerbaijan can offer students only the Azerbaijani sector.

However, it is not sufficient to enroll in the school to build the feeling of belonging to a particular stratum. The education in the school, both academically and simply by providing access to the school's society, teaches students in a specific way that across the years forms a certain hypnotized perception of the value of personal belonging in children: Azerbaijani-sector students are more likely will share the value of local culture of Azerbaijan; Russian-sector ones will value rather global ambitions for utilizing the language and connections in career; English pupils will be oriented on international opportunities and will be less connected to the local sentiments. Piller (2016) highlights that those feelings are not accidental, but can be perceived as a stabilization mechanism of the system of hierarchy when it is more comfortable for people to stay in their own community, be educated in the same way, and share the same sentiments. Moreover, arguing the point of Duchêne and Heller on language as a market asset, Piller underlines (ibid) that this stabilization mechanism can exist only because of the unequal distribution of this "market asset". That observation, along with the conceptualization of Mammadov et al. (2022) and Abdurahmanova (2023) regarding aspiration and self-esteem of students, allows us to state that we can expect different self-perception and ambitions among different linguistic populations by the factor of belonging and unequal distribution of language as a commodity.

This insight is supported by the study of Freire and Alemán (2021), which presents evidence of how institutional bilingualism can create internal divisions when different language streams receive unequal resources or symbolic recognition. They describe this feeling of unequal positioning as “two schools within one”, depending on the language track. Although, the study has explored urban U.S. schools, the general idea of the linkage between unequal distribution of academic opportunities and stratification perception even within the walls of the same school is presented in even the most successful multilingual models of education (as it will be demonstrated).

Summarizing, we can highlight that institutionalized linguistic stratification has the potential to reinforce inequality when it is related to economic, cultural, regional, and societal aspects. The combination of each of them can create a particular dynamic pattern of human development on the scale of person, community, and country as a whole. The modern situation is shaped by historical events and trends, which should be explored with the aim to spotlight independent variables which can be used to steer the trends of human development, avoiding psychologically crippling comorbid effects and tendencies

### **1.1.3. Neurocognitive Diversity and Multilingualism**

Exploring the long-term consequences of multilingualism, Esposito (2021) and Alshewiter et al. (2024), argue that bilingual education positively influences executive functions, cognitive flexibility, and academic outcomes. Their findings suggest that students who are allowed to engage in instruction through multiple languages demonstrate enhanced cognitive performance, self-regulation, and academic persistence - skills closely tied to long-term academic success. This evidence supports the theory of beneficial outcomes of translanguaging among students in the academic sphere, as well as the general superior development of cognitive performance.

Nevertheless, studies on bilingualism effects on children’s cognitive development show conflicting results in recent research. Gunnerud et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analysis, which demonstrated that bilingual children tend to develop superior executive functions which including attention abilities, working memory, and task-switching capabilities. However, the authors stress that bilingualism produces non-standard effects that strongly rely on particular environmental conditions.

The evidence supporting bilingual advantages remains inconsistent provided by Paap et al. (2019). The study argues that different research methods, including sample choices and

cognitive task types, create inconsistencies between studies. The authors support the call for better research methods that use standardized procedures to achieve precise results. The research indicates bilingualism might provide cognitive advantages to children, but scientists should be cautious when making generalizations because methodological issues and environmental factors create uncertainty in the findings.

The narrative about bilingual advantages faces growing criticism from various scholars. Chamorro (2021) expresses doubt about the universal application of bilingual cognitive benefits because methodological flaws and biased reporting have likely exaggerated bilingual advantages. According to De Cat (2021), socioeconomic status (SES) rather than bilingualism itself explains most observed differences in cognitive performance. Bialystok (2015) supports bilingual cognitive advantages but recognizes these criticisms by advocating for controlled comparative research to separate linguistic effects from confounding variables.

The research results have significant effects on educational policies. The neurocognitive advantages of multilingualism validate educational policies that promote early language integration and recognize students' diverse linguistic backgrounds. The excessive focus on cognitive benefits from bilingualism might unintentionally maintain instrumentalist views about language, which fail to recognize its cultural, emotional, and identity-based aspects. The value of bilingualism exceeds brain scans and test scores, according to researchers who warn against reducing its worth to these metrics while understanding it as part of human development.

The neurocognitive research about multilingualism provides important insights about how language affects mental processes, but it requires a thorough analysis of sociocultural elements, psychological factors, and institutional frameworks. The following chapter demonstrates that multilingual policy implementation and its resulting effects differ substantially between regions because of their unique historical backgrounds, power structures, and ideological perspectives.

## **1.2. Psychological Implications of Language-Based Stratification in Global and Post-Soviet Contexts**

The theoretical findings provided in the previous sections should not be perceived solely as a theoretical concept. On the other hand, the studies provide an instrument of comprehension to be used within the local and global context. Within the current section, there will be provided



the evidence of applicability of the so far discussed theories with due attention to the local specifics and common features of multilingualism.

### **1.2.1. Language Hierarchies and Their Psychological Effects: Global Perspectives**

Multilingualism as a global trend of economic and cultural globalism is impossible to deny. In modern days, linguistic politics has become a subject of polarization by both ideological and practical aspects. The stratificational power of endorsing multilingualism institutions has already been discussed. However, the ideology of cultural diversity, economic expediency, and the neoliberal commodification of capabilities positions multilingualism as an inevitable and positive trend that should be supported. Therefore, the negative consequences of such a policy are to be met, coped, and prevented if possible, avoiding marginalization and reproduction of social inequality that can be followed by the ideology of inclusion (Skutnabb-Kangas & May, 2017)

The English language has become one of the most prevalent languages of socioeconomic inclusion in the global market. Siemud et al. (2020) support this thesis and underline that English-Medium instruction (EMI) popularity reflects the increasing alignment of language education with global market imperatives. Huang (2024) develops the framework further, demonstrating that students who learn through EMI develop better self-efficacy, together with stronger academic competence. Moreover, students in EMI tracks receive better teacher expectations, along with increased institutional support and internationalized curricula exposure, which creates stronger academic self-concepts. This trend is particularly notable in post-Soviet space, where the Western global market became accessible for the locals, which provoked unprecedented for those countries demand in English language proficiency. Popova (2023) also notes the overall tendency of displacement of the Russian language in favor of English, due to the higher international and sometimes economic utility of the second one in the post-Soviet space. As it has been further disclosed, those trends are also noticeable in Azerbaijan.

The former colonial languages (English, French, Spanish) related by colonial period economic connections achieve additional value, exceeding the cultural symbolic value of many regional languages. In the situation of positioning education as an institution of primary success and future opportunities, students and parents, facing the choice between regional and international language, predictably give preference to the last one, considering its aspirational power. The subtractive nature of language choice causes displacement and marginalization of

local languages among youth, which creates the negative dynamic of national identities (Skutnabb-Kangas & May, 2017; Popova, 2023).

The policy of enriching the cultural capital of minor languages by the implementation of national programs is perceived to be insufficient to outweigh the tremendous mobility value of international languages. Therefore, speaking realistically, trying to balance the value of money by cultural value, whether not working or working with risks to provoke dangerous nationalistic antagonizations. However, the balance is proven to be achievable, and we can see it in comparatively more successful models. For instance, in the further sections will be presented the multilingual model of Switzerland's, Canadian, and South African education, which prioritizes additive linguistic politics, instead of subtractive. It leads to shortening the range of linguistic hierarchies, but nevertheless, the symbolic and material values disparities are still noticeable. But the additive logistical politics are rather implying a common contribution of every language into the personal capital, avoiding potential antagonization between global and local languages.

One could retort that the experience of Switzerland and Canada is not completely fair, as far as Italian, German, French, and English languages (which are considered local for the countries) are all considered the prestige global languages in different degrees. But the same situation we can track even in such extreme cases as Singapore, where 48.3% of the population speaks English at home, and only 29.9% speaks Mandarin (the rest languages present less than in 10% each) (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2020). Leimgruber, Siemund, and Terrasa (2018) demonstrate that the Singapore population has a positive attitude to both local and international languages. Moreover, according to the Singapore Department of Statistics (2020), 74.3% of the population speaks at least 2 languages (whereas in 56.1% of cases, the second language among English-speakers is Mandarin). This provides a more detailed perspective on linguistic politics of Singapore as integrative multilingualism, where regional and international languages are not counterpartyed, but aligned within the education institution.

Presented evidence demonstrates the general trends of globalization of multilingualism associated with socioeconomical and psychological motivations. The underlined challenges of multilingualism have been presented within the canvas of governmental politics, balancing between national interests and market realities. Although one cannot stop the global dynamics caused by objective socioeconomical trends, one can adapt, multiplying the advantages, and withstand the disadvantages.

### **1.2.2. Linguistic Heritage and Identity Conflicts in Post-Soviet Systems**

Shifting the scope from the global experience to the regional, we consider the former Soviet Union Republics. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new countries faced the need to form a new educational system that would rely on national interests. Yet, as it had been unanimously accepted by Pavlenko (2008) and Kosaretsky (2024), the soviet system of education had been replicated in liberated countries in many ways, especially in the matters of privileged status of the Russian language, which actualized the problem of linguistic stratification as a national issue. Particular attention was given to the notes on how Russification across post-Soviet space internalized both linguistic practices and beliefs about Russian language supremacy. The education system presented Russian as the language of modernity, administration, and intelligence. These associations have been proven to be remarkably durable. The Russian language maintains symbolic power in Ukraine and the Baltic States, even though these countries have implemented strong language revival initiatives to balance the Russian dominance of local media, urban cultural areas, and its prominence among older citizens.

The historical roots of such a state of affairs descend to the politics of hidden linguistic centralization of the Soviet Union, successfully implemented for nearly 100 years. Within such a system, the legitimate language – Russian – became a necessary symbolic asset to achieve an administrative, scientific career, global mobility (limited by the borders of the Soviet Union), whereas regional national languages could have solely cultural or local significance (Grenoble, 2003). Institutionalized hierarchy of languages has been articulated in any aspect of human life, from education to career ambition. Wigglesworth-Baker (2015), analyzing post-Soviet Tatarstan, highlights how the Soviet model of linguistic planning systematically marginalized non-Russian languages by limiting its applicability to solely local cultural capital, while the Russian language posed as a gatekeeping factor for aspirations. The intensity of this trend can be heterogeneous across the Republics, but in general, the system persistently internalized the privileged positions of the Russian language across the USSR.

In the aftermath of independence, the formal Republics, motivated by national revival, built a new system of education, with special consideration of the local language (Polese & Isaacs, 2016). Along with the rest countries, Azerbaijan manifested a radical nationalization of the administration and education in matters of language of use. Moreover, as Akyıldız (2019) highlights, it was only a part of a broader strategy of nurturing the national ideological

continuity along with the counteraction to the policy of Russification embedded in Azerbaijan for the last 71 years of dependence.

It is generally accepted that, such a radical shift cannot be implemented in a short-term perspective without causing antagonization. As far as not all of the new states can withstand economic and employment competition with Russia, the aspirational factor still covertly counteracts the politics of de-Russification. In the emerged situation of linguistic competition, to avoid potential conflicts, the dual system has been implemented: the national language and Russian-language schooling. This strategy wisely mitigated the tension of the short-term nationalization of the country, focusing on the alternative ways of de-Russification. However, the emerging demand for English language made the national policy even more sophisticated. Yet, the movement of de-Englification has not emerged, but instead, the institutions focus on the additive strategy of internalization of English into the system of education.

For instance, the implementation of English education can be spotlighted in the case of Kazakhstan. The government of Kazakhstan established English-medium education as a core component of its recent language-in-education reforms, which align with the state's trilingual policy agenda. Karabassova (2021) shows that EMI implementation differs substantially between elite schools like Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools and standard public educational institutions. The elite schools receive better-trained teachers, stronger institutional support, and higher student preparedness, but the public schools face inadequate resources and limited English teacher proficiency. The inconsistent implementation of English-language education reveals systemic inequalities in Kazakhstani education, which stem from institutional and regional variations instead of national uniformity.

The dual-system compromise, besides its mentioned reasoning, contributed to the overall Soviet-model educational system, which creates a significant drag on the dynamic of changes. Kosaretsky et al. (2024) in the recent study articulate the root problem of systematic narrowing of the educational track and associated opportunities, by the factor of language and linked socioeconomical census, preserved in Azerbaijan as a post-Soviet state. Kulyk (2016) even more radicalizes this topic, taking into consideration the significant worsening of relationships between Russia and Ukraine after 2014, suggesting that the application of the Russian language within the educational system can negatively affect the development of national self-identification. This conception underlines the role of language in the post-Soviet space as a subject of international influence and national self-identity integrity.

In the case of Azerbaijan, this reasoning has also been taken into consideration. As Akıldız (2019) argues, the linguistic policies in post-Soviet Azerbaijan were not solely designed to promote the national language as a state language, but also to nurture the feeling of national identity, that considered a vital source of integrity according to the politics of national states. Following the insight of the author, we can suggest that counterpartyed linguistic policy can also contribute - and in particular post-Soviet countries, such as Belarus and Ukraine, actively contribute – the struggles of national identity and authenticity.

The Baltic States, as implementors of the most radical de-Russification politics, experience a similar linguistic tension because their national language policies work to strengthen their native languages while dealing with significant Russian-speaking populations. According to Lazdiņa and Marten (2019), multilingualism exists as both a demographic reality and a politically sensitive issue which plays out through identity, integration, and national sovereignty debates in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The implemented policies, which include citizenship language requirements and educational language reforms, have promoted social cohesion but have sparked arguments about equality and minority language rights in diverse linguistic communities.

This section comprehends the linguistic national policy within the historical context of the post-Soviet epoch, with special attention to the problem of national self-identity, radically actualized after the declarations of independence. The cases of Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and the Baltic States demonstrated the universality of the issue within the former Soviet Republics, along with different scales of local concerns caused by ethnical self-identity questioning. Acknowledging this issue should also contribute to the understanding of multilingualism as a very ethically sensitive topic, which can cause psychological identification struggles among the population.

### **1.2.3. Azerbaijan: Language of Instruction as a Factor in Student Identity and Aspiration**

Until that moment, the case of Azerbaijan was discussed within the context of the risen aspects of multilingualism. This section presents the summarized evidence, presenting the reality of Azerbaijan as a whole, providing a multifactorial perspective.

The case of Azerbaijan provides a distinct illustration of how language operates not only as a communication system but as a system of stratification and symbolic capital. Azerbaijan inherited from the Soviet multilingual environment and is currently going through rapid

globalization, maintaining a triadic educational language structure – Azerbaijani, Russian, and English – each carrying different social values and symbolic capital. While the nationalization of education since the 1990s has played its role in the revival of Azerbaijani as the dominant language in public institutions, the parallel persistence of Russian-medium schools and the rapid expansion of English-medium instruction reveal a more complex, stratified language landscape.

In general, the Russian-language schools in Azerbaijan are attended by urban, relatively socioeconomically privileged families. As noted by Abdurahmanova (2023), their appeal often lies not only in linguistic tradition but also in the perception of higher academic standards and better university placement rates. Although this trend is decreasing, it is relevant in cities like Baku, where Russian is still widely used in professional, academic, and media environments. English has also gained prestige through its association with international education and social mobility. Mammadov and Mammadova (2022) argue that this shift is not a result of coherent state policy, but rather elite-driven initiatives such as private schools, international university partnerships, and transnational aspirations.

This stratification is very deeply entrenched in educational geography. English-medium institutions are mainly situated in urban areas, especially in the capital, while the rural areas are neglected by international contribution. This geographical distribution also reinforces inequality, resulting in a *de facto* hierarchy in linguistic capital. Moreover, the quality of infrastructure, teacher training, and curricular innovation is strongly correlated with the language of instruction, and English-stream schools often receive superior resources from international programs.

Language in Azerbaijan also operates at the level of self-perception and psychological formation. The public views Russian- and English-medium schools in Azerbaijan as more prestigious academically and socially beneficial which makes them more appealing to families especially in urban areas (Abdurahmanova, 2023). Families tend to choose these schools because they associate them with symbolic and economic advantages based on the language of instruction. The current study investigates the psychological effects of educational segregation through limited research yet predicts that structural and symbolic differences will produce distinct student self-perception and self-esteem and aspiration patterns. While there is limited empirical research on the psychological outcomes of this stratification, the present study hypothesizes that such structural and symbolic differences may contribute to differentiated

patterns of self-perception, self-esteem, and aspiration among students. It is further assumed that both students and parents may internalize these hierarchies, shaping expectations about educational success and personal worth. This is consistent with the phenomenon of “gentrification” of bilingual education discussed by Delavan (2021), where bilingualism becomes a status symbol of the elite rather than a tool of social mobility. In this context, Azerbaijani-medium students may develop a perception of the limited horizon or lower social status, which may become a self-reinforcing psychological limitation.

The Azerbaijani state is thus in a difficult position to ensure the civic centrality of the national language while at the same time responding to the pragmatic requirements of linguistic diversity and global competitiveness. Although efforts have been made to promote Azerbaijani through cultural programs and administrative policy, these efforts often fail to offset the socioeconomic attractiveness of Russian and English. When discussing local languages in Azerbaijan, Aghayev (2016), in his study *Language Situation in Azerbaijan*, describes their dynamics as follows: “*Armenian, Budukh and Tat are shifting; Avar, Khinalugh, Kryts (Quba), Lezgi, Rutul (Sheki, Kakh) and Tsakhur are threatened; Judeo-Tat and Khalaj are vigorous; Kurdish and Udi are developing languages.*” This classification illustrates language trajectories as rather chaotic and heterogeneous than centrally regulated. As Blommaert (2015) and Duchêne & Heller (2012) stated, the value of a language is never fixed and is always being redefined in the light of changing social, economic, and political circumstances. In Azerbaijan, these conditions have rather solidified in the development of language-based educational tracks that function also as social paths.

Symbolic hierarchies are not only passed on from the Soviet past, but they are also currently being reproduced through institutional practices and parental choices. These inequalities are worsened by the lack of consistent policy frameworks to ensure that linguistic capital is distributed fairly. Unless these structural disparities are addressed through inclusive language planning, equitable resource allocation, and reflexive educational design, the educational system will continue to reinforce stratification rather than overcome it.

### **1.3. Multilingual Environment and Adolescent Psychological Development**

The relationship between bilingualism and identity, self-esteem, and aspirations formation, during adolescence, is a promising field of analysis, where the psychosocial effects of students in a multilingual environment become visible. Adolescents are passing through a period of increased self-awareness, peer comparison, and an emerging feeling of independence. This susceptible state amplifies the influence of language on how young people define themselves, their ambitions, and their role in the world. In multilingual societies, like Azerbaijan, where linguistic choices are closely tied to class distinctions and sociopolitical symbolism, the function of bilingualism represents not only a practical skill, but also a symbolic resource through which adolescents construct and negotiate their identities. Within this section, we will explore how this sophisticated but crucial impact of multilingualism affects the very basic psychological settings of self-concept, self-esteem, and aspiration among adolescents.

#### **1.3.1. Bilingualism and Identity in Adolescence**

For adolescents situated in multilingual contexts, the management of linguistic diversity can result not only in identity-enriching resources but also in psychological conflicts linked to language ideology. These tensions emerge most visibly in settings where language practices are tightly bound to social expectations and institutional hierarchies, producing a discursive environment in which particular languages are coded as legitimate and others as deficient, or threatening. In such environments, students are more often prone to cognitive and emotional dissonance.

Hamman-Ortiz (2020) observes that students educated in bilingual contexts often report feeling of empowerment associated with their linguistic position. Access to multiple languages enables them to be involved in diverse cultural and social areas, it can also enhance their awareness of their linguistic choices and how these choices are read by others. However, the access to language exposure may cause what has been described as identity fatigue, the psychological disturbances of constant self-monitoring, linguistic accommodation, and anticipatory adjustment to perceived norms.

In the Azerbaijani educational system, such pressures may be imposed by the mismatched ideological premises of Azerbaijani, Russian, and English. While Azerbaijani has formal status as the national language and is promoted through official discourse, Russian retains a historical background of prestige, associated with cultural capital and elite networks.



English, on the other hand, represents cosmopolitan belonging. For students, shifting between them often requires more than one code-switch. Peace-Hughes (2021) remarks, children in multilingual environments shape their language preferences, not only through personal affinity, but through a strategic leveraging of social advantage. Considering this, language shifting is associated with global shifting of perspectives, social positioning, and moral orienters, which can be overwhelming for adolescents.

It is not merely a question of feeling proud or ashamed by the language that students speak, it's even more related to living through the contradiction between ideals of bilingualism and the structural inequalities that constrain it. Even though systematic studies remain limited, anecdotal qualitative interviews, such as those reported in Bogdanova (2022), demonstrate that many express pride in being able to move between languages and cultural settings, yet also describe moments of exclusion or confusion when their language use is questioned or devalued by peers or institutions. Huang (2024) also supports the point that students in non-EMI streams develop negative perceptions about their educational path because they view it as less valuable and less globally relevant, which reduces their motivation and aspiration. These experiences are particularly pronounced in schools that implicitly prioritize one language over others by offering greater resources, more qualified staff, or pathways to international recognition in specific language streams.

The intricate nature of bilingualism opposes basic notions that view bilingualism as an unchanging trait or an exclusively positive quality. The formation of identity among Azerbaijani bilingual adolescents shows strong signs of being dynamic and influenced by specific contexts. Through language, people express their personal beliefs while managing friendships and fulfilling expectations about social position and achievement. The psychological landscape develops into a space where recognition, insecurity, ambition, and contradiction merge.

The Azerbaijani educational system strongly influences identity formation, as far as language instruction functions as both a symbolic and structural driver. Students need to understand the hidden meanings behind language streams because each stream links to different levels of cultural value, economic potential, and civic status. The psychosocial effects of multilingual education in Azerbaijan depend on how adolescents process and adopt these narratives. The following sections analyze the relationship between language prestige and

social belonging and their effects on self-esteem, along with life aspirations among students from different school types and linguistic backgrounds.

### **1.3.2. Self-Esteem as a Mediator of School Belonging**

Previously, it has been discussed how the school environment can develop self-identity in students through social group belonging, academic curricula, and mediating those two factors language of instruction. However, the self-identity itself is strongly related to self-esteem, which is also emerging in the school environment and attributed to both academic and societal aspects. The rapid expansion of cognitive, emotional, and social capacities is especially susceptible to the environment. School as the major institution of socialization, becomes a crucial factor of forming the self-esteem of a student, and can nurture the positive self-concept, as well as negative. Language of instruction presented in the perspective of socioeconomic value also achieves psychological significance in matters of self-concept and self-esteem.

One of the most significant authors developing the concept of self-esteem, Rosenberg comprehends this phenomenon as relatively stable, but significantly determined by cultural and social environment during the early stages of development. His Self-Esteem Scale reflects this notion that the self-esteem concept is universal but not culturally unified, and any particular cultural and linguistic surroundings should be taken into consideration during the validation of the results of the test. Family, peer group, and school environment become the major actors that can determine the feeling of self-worth in growing children, and even in adult people.

Developing the concept of self-worth, Orth, Robins, and Widaman (2012), in their longitudinal analysis of self-esteem across the lifespan, discovered two distinguishable trajectories of development of self-regard: consolidating and destabilizing. Although the authors do not use those characteristics specifically as terms, they can be described so. The study demonstrates that the majority of adolescents show moderate increases in self-esteem over time, while a minority experience attenuated or downward tendencies. The authors do not directly underline the reasons for this disparity; however, within the current research work, we propose the hypothesis that potentially it can be related to the educational environment, peer feedback, perceived belonging, and, mediating all those factors, language and socioeconomic position.

Postigo et al. (2022) expand the perspectives of the psychological effects of such environments, pointing out that declines in academic self-concept are particularly steep during

the secondary school years when social comparisons become more intense and institutional tracking becomes more visible. In the Azerbaijani context, this transition often coincides with the moment students become acutely aware of the prestige gradients between Russian-, English-, and Azerbaijani-medium schools. Students in Azerbaijani-language streams may start to doubt the value of their education, especially when they are exposed to narratives that portray their peers in other streams as more competent, internationally mobile, or economically advantaged.

The emotional and psychological consequences align with the "vicious circle" pattern, which Sevinc and Backus (2017) identify in linguistically stratified environments. The research by Sevinc and Backus shows that immigrant students avoid using the dominant societal language because of their low proficiency, which results in fewer opportunities to develop their language skills. In its general principles, the mechanism operates similarly in immigrant families as it does in Azerbaijan's stratified multilingual systems. Accordingly, expected that students who learn Azerbaijani at home experience linguistic and social estrangement when they attend Russian- or English-medium schools because their instructional language skills remain weak. The linguistic mismatch creates internalized feelings of inferiority, which prevent students from participating, thus worsening their existing educational inequalities (ibid). This evidence allows us to hypothesize that students from Azerbaijani-sector schools who do not encounter elite languages develop a sense of being excluded from prestigious paths, which can directly limit their aspirations and self-worth. This is not necessarily linked to academic performance per se, but to the broader societal view that associates Azerbaijanis with limited mobility and provincial identity. Students report that these perceptions affect peer dynamics, where linguistic affiliation often substitutes for social status (Bogdanova, 2022).

Zhao et al. (2021) and Baumeister et al. (2003) present an alternative perspective on self-esteem. Their finding demonstrates that self-esteem in general supports motivation, engagement, persistence, and interpersonal negotiation among students. Although the authors do not directly associate this positive effect with life success or achievement, Orth, Robins, and Widaman (2017) articulate such a correlation, which allows one to suggest that self-esteem has multiple levels of influence, which can potentially reinforce ascending or descending trajectories of personal achievements and well-being. Considering language of instruction and its institutionalized nature, we can assume that linguistic factors can affect one's success through the psychological dimension, along with socioeconomical and cultural.

Taken together, these theoretical and empirical contributions in comprehension of the concept of self-esteem and its significance demonstrate the major aspect to be considered in the current study – psychological. For the subject of Psychology, it is naturally the most important component due to its personal importance for a human, its empirical scientific significance, and the most evident mediating variable, susceptible to any of the noted issues related to environmental nurturing. The role of language as both, environmental and self-identity factor is crucial for the comprehension of psychodynamics. Especially the importance of psycholinguistic studies arises in such polarized countries as Azerbaijan, where the language of instruction in many ways determines the future of students as socioeconomical actors, and persons themselves.

### **1.3.3. Aspirational Psychology in Linguistically Stratified Educational Systems**

Developing the psychological component of the current study, we cannot avoid another crucial parameter, presenting both environmental and personal aspects mentioned before – aspiration. Educational and occupational aspirations are not merely occasional ambitions, but rather predispositions formed during the process of maturation and education. Especially in adolescence, we can notice how the surrounding and personal perspective of oneself forms its ambitions and future outlooks. Naturally, we perceive the future as a model of prediction based on our experience of the past. Closer to the school graduation, students achieve the initial understanding of who they are and what they can count on, considering their competencies that provide particular opportunities.

Broadening the understanding of the origin of aspiration, Eccles and Wigfield's (2002) expectancy-value theory suggests two central dimensions: expectancy of success (the belief in one's competence) and the subjective task value (the importance attached to the task). Those components are not static and are highly determined by the environmental education, which implements particular core values related to personal competence and the task's value. This model provides further insight in the form of the question, "How does education and language in particular determine personal values and expectations?". It has already been mentioned above that language in linguistically heterogeneous societies provides different opportunities. Now we can suggest that it also provides a different perception of opportunities and their value.

Previously, analyzing the studies regarding certain socioeconomic opportunities related to a particular language in Azerbaijan, the psychological component of aspiration has been presented as solely comorbid. Khattab (2015), in turn, develops the general understanding of

the academic aspiration and demonstrates that specific opportunities linked to education also form corresponding expectations in students. Moreover, the more prestigious the school is and the more opportunities this school can offer, the higher aspirations and clearer educational goals students possess. Although Khattab presents the theory based on British experience, the previous theoretical finding of this study allows us to assume that this experience is applicable to the case of Azerbaijan, considering the abovementioned distinctive linkage between language of instruction and related socioeconomic opportunities. Therefore, we can hypothesize that Russian- and English-sectors students will demonstrate a higher level of aspiration and motivation in academic success, rather than in Azerbaijani-sector schools.

Norton (2013) develops this idea further with her concept of "investment," which links language learning to broader social aspirations and imagined future identities. For many Azerbaijani students, English investment may represent their wish to become a global professional or a modern cosmopolitan subject, while Russian investment may represent their desire to join the traditionally prestigious intelligentsia. Bilingualism thus becomes a pathway to different social destinations, but also presents identity dilemmas when languages carry conflicting symbolic meanings, such as Azerbaijani as a marker of national authenticity, Russian as a post-Soviet legacy, and English as a global economic asset.

Despite the fact that current theoretical comprehension is sufficient to form the core understanding of the nature of aspiration, it is worth highlighting the third variables to be considered. Woreta (2024) and Howard (2012), for instance, underline that sociocultural context, such as gender, ethnic identity, and perceived social mobility, shapes the future-oriented self-concept of students. While those studies do not directly involve the factor of language, we should take into consideration that the complex and overlapping nature of such a broad topic of psycholinguistics and sociology should at least raise attention to those mediating factors. Furthermore, such controllable variables in the global model of motivation and self-concept can be used to steer the aspirations and expectations among students to avoid negative effects

The major negative outcome emerges in the situation when aspiration does not meet its practical realization. Daphna Oyserman (2015) conceptualized this phenomenon that can be named as over-aspiration - a psychological state in which individuals maintain high ambitions without the practical means to achieve them, which causes demotivation, a decrease in self-esteem, and problematization of self-concept. This notion is commonly overlooked by

policymakers, who rather nurture over-motivation in students. Naturally, over-aspiration is more prevalent among students with a higher level of aspiration, therefore, in students of prestigious schools. In the context of Azerbaijan, we can relate over-aspiration to Russian- and English-sector students, whereas hypothesized lower aspiration among Azerbaijani-sector pupils will be less likely to cause that issue.

Educational and occupational aspirations during adolescence develop from the combination of linguistic environment with institutional prestige, and sociocultural factors. The language of instruction functions as both a practical tool and a symbolic indicator of perceived opportunity while directing student motivation, which affects their self-efficacy and future expectations. The research indicates that students in prestigious linguistic tracks develop more ambitious aspirations, which sometimes exceed their actual opportunities, thus creating over-aspiration risks. Educational environments need to match both the symbolic value of language and realistic equitable pathways to fulfillment to prevent psychological dissonance and support grounded aspiration development that respects the context.

In the context of Azerbaijan and other post-Soviet countries, aspiration is expected to be highly determined by the language factor. Firstly, as a marker of social inclusion or exclusion, shaping personal values, and secondly, by the institutionalized nature of unequal distribution of resources and opportunities for students. Those aspects shape both aspirations associated with the linguistic environment and language competency, required for the realization of aspirations. The following section explores how the prestige associated with different educational paths shapes the aspiration tendencies among students.

#### **1.4. Comparative Models of Multilingual Education and Their Psychological Significance**

It has been said enough about the importance of language and multilingualism within the system-determination framework. In this section will be spotlighted another aspect – the significance of flexible, aimed to prevent psychological negative effects language. One of the most successful practices, addressing emerging challenges related to linguistic heterogeneity, is so-called translanguaging. Cenoz and Groter (2017) describe this approach as a deliberate pedagogical strategy that allows multilingual students to use their full linguistic capacities for learning, broadening the classical monolingual approach to education. Claudia Vallejo (2018) reviews the conceptual synthesis of García and Wei on translanguaging, highlighting those languages should not be seen as bounded systems, but rather as dynamic practices that can be used by multilingual individuals. From this perspective, a multilingual system becomes truly

inclusive and can complement the aspirations and self-identification of students rather than cause antagonization.

In its nature, languages never existed as strongly determined systems of symbols and meaning. Language is a dynamic framework that was intended to be an inclusive, rather than exclusive medium. Within one language, we can detect the contribution of dozens of others, which makes the language alive, flexible, and rich. As Creese & Blackledge (2015) fairly highlight, translanguaging considers languages not as a closed, autonomous system, but as a part of one practical linguistic repertoire of the speaker. In the environment similar to Azerbaijan and post-Soviet countries in general, when students are more likely to have some proficiency in several languages at the same time, the scholarly linguistic restriction does not allow the advantage of multilingualism to emerge and develop. While a student can consume media in English, speak at home in Azerbaijani, and study at school in Russian, it is perceived as more promising to use the school environment to provide the space for practical linguistic opportunities beyond limits. While it can be assumed that such an approach can cause educational disruptions among students without sufficient fluency in all used by peers languages, Abizada & Seyidova (2021) empirically demonstrated, that insufficient competency in peer-speaking language can firstly cause academic underperformance, but within 2 years academic success turns back to average indexes among pupils.

Moreover, the research by Sun et al. (2021) on bilingual preschoolers in Singapore revealed that children who had better receptive vocabulary in both languages (English and Mandarin) and more experience with active language use showed better social-emotional and behavioral skills. The results of this study contribute to the general understanding of positive outcomes in establishing supportive linguistic environments that promote dual language use to enhance both language development and social-emotional well-being of children. Such reorientation mitigates the negative effect of lingual stratification by operating its origin – disbalance of opportunities. Consequently, providing positive psychological trends, avoiding feeling of unfair social exclusion.

Despite the promising evidence on translanguaging, this strategy remains underutilized in formal schooling systems, especially in the post-Soviet space. Supposedly, the resistance to such a progressive method of education originates in centralized governmental politics on institutionalized education. The reform of education, which would implement a comparatively experimental strategy as a nationwide program, is a difficult undertaking. Especially giving into

consideration the ideology of national identity nurturing in its relation to the matters of language. Therefore, the implementation of such or alternative linguistic models requires a fundamental shift in governmental politics and goals, which are not perceived to be feasible at least in the short-term perspective. Foresaid can also be related to the case of Azerbaijan. However, the policy of obligatory study of the Azerbaijani language and national literature on Azerbaijani language in Russian-sector schools can be considered a first step to the implementation of bilingual education.

The case of Singapore represents the psychological significance of linguistical surrounding and shaping it politics. Despite the fact that we do not possess the empirical quantitative longitude data, which would present the psychological dynamics associated with policy implementation, relying on well-developed theoretical grounds of interrelation between language, SES, and psychological well-being, we can deduce that mitigating the problem of linguistical and comorbid economical stratification also prevents associated with it psychological distress. In the following sections there will be presented significant cases of multilingual policy implications, their advantages and disadvantages. The special attention is given to the effectiveness of resolving the core problem for the psychological well-being mentioned above – linked to the language stratification and segregation.

#### **1.4.1. Switzerland: Decentralized Multilingual Equity**

Switzerland is an outstanding case of territorial multilingual education, which allows each canton to select its instructional language according to local linguistic characteristics. The decentralized system supports culturally responsive curriculum development and teacher preparation, which maintains equal standing for German, French, Italian, and Romansh throughout their respective areas. The implementation of plurilingual pedagogies that value learners' full linguistic repertoires and promote metalinguistic awareness is described in detail by Frail and Gonzales (2020). The main educational method employed in this approach is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which enables students to learn both subjects and languages through associated instruction. The implementation of CLIL in Switzerland remains in development, but research by Lorenzo et al. (2021) demonstrates that CLIL leads to better educational equity and linguistic competence when resources are adequate and distribution is fair in traditionally monolingual areas.

The Swiss model officially promotes linguistic diversity, yet Berthele (2020) warns that standard varieties receive most institutional support and prestige, which pushes local dialects



and minority voices toward the periphery. The combination of viewpoints allows us to conclude that plurilingual and integrated models demonstrate great potential for linguistic justice and inclusion, yet require ongoing analysis of hidden inequalities found in language ideologies and institutional practices. Nonetheless, the Swiss model remains a compelling case of how multilingualism can be normalized within public education without resorting to assimilationist policies.

The comparison between Azerbaijan and Switzerland serves as a useful political reference point because it shows how institutional design can reduce linguistic stratification effects without providing a direct blueprint. The Swiss model shows how linguistic diversity becomes a resource instead of a liability through decentralized authority and equal civic status for multiple languages and investments in pedagogical infrastructure. The following sections examine Canada and South Africa as they implement alternative models of multilingual education through different historical and cultural frameworks.

#### **1.4.2. Canada: Immersion and Limited Inclusion**

The French immersion program of Canada which established in the 1960s, addressing the 1969 Official Languages Act, functions as a bilingual educational system in the aim to build national unity and expand French education opportunities for Anglophone students (Dicks & Genesse, 2017). The program was implemented within all subjects, including mathematics, science, and history, through the French language instead of teaching French as a separate subject. The educational method works to establish practical bilingual abilities through combined language education and subject matter instruction. The program has adapted throughout time to support students from different backgrounds and educational settings. The authors of Garrett and Mady (2024) deliver an extensive analysis of the French immersion program's historical progression through their discussion of student population shifts, educational program modifications, and teaching approaches. The fundamental goal of bilingual education has not changed, but educational institutions have implemented modifications to meet present-day educational requirements and obstacles. The program's flexible design, together with its content-based language instruction approach, has made it a successful and flexible model for teaching second languages.

Nevertheless, research conducted recently has shown that these programs may not be inclusive to all groups. Kunnas (2023), in her critical policy analysis of French immersion in Ontario, notes that the programs are mainly for White, middle-class, English-speaking families.

Her study reveals that there are systemic barriers, including assumptions about parental language skills, lack of financial support, and a Eurocentric curriculum that prevent marginalized and multilingual communities from accessing the programs. Moreover, Statistics Canada (2023) indicates that French immersion enrollment is significantly higher in urban areas and among children from higher-income households, which shows that there are geographical and socio-economic disparities. These findings indicate that although French immersion has increased bilingualism among some groups, it may contribute existing educational inequalities if issues of access and equity are not addressed with due consistency.

The Canadian experience proves that additive bilingual education enables students to explore broader academic opportunities and understand different sociocultural backgrounds. The model establishes bilingualism as a public good that benefits all students equally. However, it demonstrates the need for continuous and significant institutional funding of teacher education, curriculum development, and policy stability. The Canadian education system has adopted immersion programs as its signature feature as a part of the adapted ideology of broad public support, along with attentive cultivation of national self-identity. Yet, the inclusion policy itself perceived to be the secondary goal, while the primal aim is to nurture the specific identity. This notion rather proclaims inefficiency of the immersion strategy in addressing the psychological values associated with equal opportunities and self-worth.

The Canadian model provides Azerbaijan with valuable lessons on how bilingualism can become a national asset while being incorporated into general education systems. The main difficulty exists in guaranteeing equal access to bilingual programs while preventing bilingual education from serving as a method of symbolic discrimination. The last case study in this chapter presents South Africa as a postcolonial nation facing challenges from its multilingual heritage alongside its historical social disparities.

#### **1.4.3. South Africa: Radical Inclusion Within Limited Capacities**

After the period of apartheid ended, South Africa established a prospective constitutional system which acknowledged eleven official languages to achieve linguistic equality and social integration. The 1997 Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) implemented a bilingual education system that supported students' native language instruction while ensuring their ability to learn English or Afrikaans as additional languages. Nugraha (2019) explains that this policy served both symbolic and practical purposes to address past educational discrimination against African languages. The LiEP established indigenous languages as

official teaching languages for early education while providing students with the opportunity to learn English or Afrikaans as additional languages.

South Africa implements its LiEP through a bilingual education system, which uses the mother tongue as the foundation. Mabiletja (2023) explains that this educational method was designed to represent South Africa's multilingual population while allowing local authorities to create school language policies that match community language needs. The policy framework supported schools to use flexible teaching methods while conducting participatory language planning activities with parents and local stakeholders. The alternative to Canadian theoretical framework aimed to support academic success while preserving linguistic equality of opportunities.

The LiEP shows progressive design, yet its realization has been irregular and unsuccessful in numerous instances. According to Nugraha (2019), English remains the primary language of instruction in numerous schools because of insufficient funding of marginalized languages and social expectations. Ogbonnaya (2024) explains that three main structural barriers prevent mother tongue-based education from succeeding: insufficient African language-trained teachers, underdeveloped teaching materials, and weak institutional support. The current limitations result in subtractive bilingualism because students are forced to switch to English before they master their native languages. Educational inequality continues to persist because bilingual education fails to deliver its intended advantages, mainly in under-resourced and rural communities. Mabiletja (2022) emphasizes that sustainable multilingual education needs localized data-based policy approaches that differ from current practices.

South Africa's constitutional recognition of multilingualism continues to serve as an essential symbol of democratic pluralism despite its limitations. The nation has established programs to create educational materials in African languages while training multilingual teachers and advancing linguistic rights throughout public discussions. The political commitment to linguistic justice becomes evident through these initiatives, although practical implementation continues to be inconsistent. The case of South Africa demonstrates that multilingual policy needs to match resource distribution, community engagement, and teacher preparedness for successful implementation. From this perspective it becomes clear the tremendous size of resources and dedication are needed to apprehend linguistic disbalances and misrepresentation. While it can be considered that the general politic aimed to support local languages by including all of them into scholar curriculum and governmental standards can

potentially negate the cause of related to sociolinguistic factor psychological distress, its achievement highly depends on resources. Moreover, nurturing heterogeneity per se is not enough to mitigate stratification related to diverse self-identity. Heterogeneity of identities should be followed by homogeneity of associated to identity opportunities. And in the case of LiEP system, that can be achieved at the primal school, where all children, independently on their language have the opportunity to get the primal education.

South Africa's experience demonstrates to Azerbaijan how multilingual ideals can diverge from actual systemic capacity. Progressive language policies that lack continuous funding and institutional oversight may create symbolic inclusion that fails to produce meaningful transformation.

## CHAPTER II. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter presented the theoretical context of the current study, demonstrating the sophisticated nature of the codependent variables associated with multilingualism. With consideration of the achieved theoretical comprehension and empirical experience, this chapter will outline the methodological specifics linked to the research process on the psychological effects of multilingualism. Within this section will be explored the instrumental, practical, and cultural challenges considered or unforeseeably emerged during the study. The addressed complications and notions have been conceptualized in their practical significance. Apart from the general comprehension of methodological nuances, the addressed critical notions are designed for future research provided.

### 2.1. Psychological Framework and Research Design

The study aimed to perform a comparative analysis of gathered data regarding self-esteem, socioeconomic status, aspiration, and linguistic capacities of 16-18-year-old school students both in Azerbaijani-sector and Russian-sector schools with the aim of discovering hypothesized correlations between the language of education, SES, aspiration, and self-esteem. The results of the analysis used for the attempt to create the prediction model, as well as theoretical comprehension in comparison with similar foreign research with the intention to prove the hypothesis which states that the factor of the language of education can be used as a reliable determinant of such vital psychological metrics as aspiration and self-esteem. The research does not imply any risk for participants or any other affiliated parties. The results of the research will provide a general understanding of the factor of linguistical deversification on the personal development of students as an actors of socioeconomical life, considering correlation between socioeconomical realization and the psychological core-aspect of self-esteem and aspiration, as well as additional data frame for the policymaking prospection for Azerbaijan and other countries within developed system of bilingual education.

The study used well-established psychological and sociolinguistic frameworks to develop the following hypotheses:

1. Self-esteem levels were expected to be higher among Russian- and English-medium students than Azerbaijani-medium students, considering the evidence that the Russian and English languages carry greater institutional prestige in the educational context;

2. English- and Russian language streams demonstrated more ambitious aspirations for education and occupation due to the better access to opportunities, along with internalized social hierarchies based on language;

3. Students' perception of language prestige acted as a mediating factor shaping their self-concept and aspirations, regardless of the language's actual societal value;

The research utilizes multiple survey instruments to investigate these questions in a triangulated manner:

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) adapted by Zolotareva (2020) for Russian speakers, and also translated into Azerbaijani to be used to measure the self-esteem variable. The RSES consists of 10 items measured on a four-point Likert scale, yielding a unidimensional score;

The Educational Aspirations and Expectations Questionnaire, based on University of Washington Behavioral Health Sciences (n.d.) model, was adapted to measure both ideal and achievable academic goals for future education in all 3 languages. The survey presented scaled options starting from "less than secondary school" and extending to "doctoral degree" for participants to choose from.

A Sociodemographic and Language Proficiency Survey was created to obtain essential background information, which included home language, instruction language, Azerbaijani, Russian, and English proficiency levels, parental occupations, and social status, as well as general demographic details.

The first design adopted a deductive correlational research method. The study sought to detect statistical relationships that demonstrated how language operates beyond educational purposes to create psychological differences.

## **2.2. Empirical Constraints & Contextual Barriers in Psychologically Susceptible Data Gathering Processes**

The research conducted a methodological reorientation because its theoretical framework and structured hypotheses experienced multiple empirical and organizational challenges to be tested. The research faced its first major barrier, articulated as the inability to obtain requested school access. The research experienced delayed Ethical Committee

responses, which combined with administrative barriers and bureaucratic delays, limited the research's ability to obtain balanced participation from Azerbaijani-, Russian-, and English-medium schools (during the research period).

The inconsistency in addressing the required access to the desired institution resulted in sampling asymmetry. The lack of equal representation between language groups led to statistical findings that lost their ability to be generalized. The final sampling distribution became disproportionately focused on one private school (the only institution that provided access for the study implementation) that taught in English instead of achieving initial linguistic and socioeconomic heterogeneity goals.

A third constraint concerned the design and adaptation of instruments of testing. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale received its validation for Russian-speaking youth from Zolotareva (2020), but its cultural and linguistic adaptation for Azerbaijani youth needed additional exploration. The time limitations prevent using the article of Aliyev B. et al (2025), which validated Rosenberg's test since it was published on April 22, 2025 (published in the ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences). The aspirations questionnaire, based on a U.S.-framework from the University of Washington Behavioral Health Sciences (n.d.) may lack complete representation of Azerbaijani cultural logics and institutional pathways, so the study used translated unvalidated versions while paying special attention to local specifics.

The political sensitivity of the topic regarding language as a learning tool, identity marker, and socioeconomic indicator may create barriers for respondents to share unbiased responses. This aspect will be disclosed further in the next sections.

The combination of these limitations forced us to conduct a substantial reevaluation of the research design. The realities of fieldwork required a change from the initial hypothesis-testing approach to a more reflexive method that focused on contextual analysis. The research method evolved from seeking general evidence to conducting a critical examination of research methods, institutional, and epistemological barriers in multilingual education systems. The analytical shift represents a strategic change rather than research failure because it reveals fresh perspectives about how language stratification operates through both theoretical frameworks and empirical research methods.

The following sections demonstrate how ethical challenges emerged from field restrictions, as well as an exhaustive explanation of the field research procedures that were implemented and to be implemented.

### **2.2.2. Cultural Validity and Linguistic Sensitivity of Psychological Instruments**

Language proficiency assessment together with self-esteem evaluation in multilingual settings faces multiple conceptual, cultural, and methodological barriers, which extend the classical standard requirements for psychometric precision. The obstacles exceed practical barriers because they demonstrate the fundamental epistemological conflict between standardized psychological constructs and the authentic life experiences of diverse linguistic communities within stratified societies. The following section analyzes the systematic problems that occur when attempting to define language and self-esteem variables in this research setting.

The educational and developmental psychological field utilizes self-esteem as a common concept, yet it lacks cultural neutrality. Standardized instruments such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale emerged from Western cultural settings that emphasize individualism, together with self-assertion and linear self-conceptualization. People from collectivist societies base their sense of personal value on maintaining social harmony while fulfilling family responsibilities and maintaining membership in their groups. The Azerbaijani cultural environment requires caution when using Western-based self-esteem measures because it neglects Soviet-era heredity with Turkic traditions, Islamic customs, and national politics specifics.

The aspirations instrument, adapted from the University of Washington Behavioral Health Sciences (n.d.), was designed to elicit students' desired and expected educational trajectories. Although the structure of the scale was familiar and generally well understood by the local population, several items posed interpretive challenges. For instance, terms such as "college" may not have practical salience for the local educational system, and therefore have been additionally provided by a local analogous degree classification - "bachelor's degree".

The aspirational gap—between what students want and what they believe they can realistically achieve—may also be shaped by cultural scripts of deference, fatalism, or resistance. As Tateo (2018) emphasizes, responses to aspirational questions often reveal more about a student's navigation of social norms and institutional discourses than about their genuine personal preferences. Nevertheless, taking into consideration the specific importance



of socioeconomic orientation for the current research, such biased data can also provide useful insights into the theoretical material discussed before.

The requirement of linguistic equivalence presents multiple complex difficulties. The Russian adaptation of the RSES received validation from Zolotareva (2020), but the Azerbaijani version in this research was developed through translated items without proper cultural validation. The translation process goes beyond linguistic changes because it requires semantic together with contextual, and ideological modifications. Affective responses to terms like "feel useful" and "feel proud" change based on personal history, along with family norms and social expectations.

The measurement of language proficiency and linguistic background faces similar measurement problems. Standard self-report tools evaluate language through specific competencies, which include reading, speaking, and understanding. Language extends beyond technical competence because it functions as a social indicator that reflects personal identity along with social power and future goals. The way students evaluate their knowledge of Russian, Azerbaijani, and English depends on both their language abilities and their emotional and ideological perspectives. Language hierarchies in Azerbaijan create specific challenges because they are linked with social status and both geographical and age-related characteristics.

The current measurement systems present a systemic problem because they adopt psychometric paradigms that assume universal cross-cultural applicability. The study demonstrates how such assumptions can prevent researchers from detecting the actual inequalities they are trying to measure. Researchers require better assessment tools, new epistemologies that recognize contextual factors, power dynamics, and mixed-models approaches.

The following section continues this critique by examining cultural bias in psychological instruments applied during this study, along with their effects on analyzing data between languages and cultural groups.

Standardized psychological instruments demonstrate questionable interpretive validity when used in multilingual and culturally hybrid settings, according to the observed findings. Nevertheless, Hambleton al. (2010) demonstrate that the objectivity in cross-cultural studies can be achieved by removing the context-specific meanings, and preliminary testing on the target-culture sample, addressing the commentaries of participants. The instruments generated

numerical results, but their fundamental semantic and ideological foundations continued to be disputed.

Future research should address these risks by focusing on both linguistic translation and cultural adaptation through the active involvement of local educators, psychologists, and community stakeholders during instrument development. Standardized tools should be used with a critical understanding of their built-in assumptions while acknowledging their context-specific boundaries.

The following section develops this methodological critique through an examination of mixed-methods research combined with longitudinal studies and participatory approaches, which provide more adaptable frameworks for studying language, identity, and aspiration.

### **2.3. Critical Methodological Reflection**

The chapter presents essential epistemological and methodological changes to address cultural, institutional, and interpretive barriers found in current research. The research on multilingualism effects on self-esteem and aspiration in post-Soviet Azerbaijan requires a shift from strict empirical frameworks to adopt reflexive and contextually aware methods. The study requires a dual-layered methodology because underdeveloped instruments and restricted access to consistent empirical implementation create limitations that need theoretical insights combined with global and locally grounded data.

The first section examines cultural sensitivities and the researcher's epistemic position by using reflexivity as a methodological strength instead of a weakness. The second section explains why researchers need to shift from standard empirical testing methods to interpretive approaches for understanding multilingual realities. The authors demonstrate that methodological rigor in politically sensitive cultural domains requires researchers to be responsive while maintaining self-awareness and integrating local knowledge systems. The repositioning strengthens scientific inquiry by making it more relevant and ethically sound in complex sociolinguistic settings.

#### **2.3.1. Cultural Sensitivity and Epistemic Reflexivity Assessing Psychological Constructs**

This research, despite its empirical limitations, offers a valuable opportunity to critically evaluate how empirical studies through cultural perspectives should be assessed in multilingual

post-Soviet countries like Azerbaijan. Due to the emergence of unpredictable institutional limitations, it has been decided to shift the study from rigid empirical verification toward a culturally and epistemologically reflective stance.

As it had been demonstrated above, the cultural sensitivity of the current study is an inherent problem that is nearly impossible to eliminate. Nevertheless, the empirical disturbance can be apprehended and mitigated through a thorough validation of measurement tools, along with shifting the research design from solely quantitative to a qualitative model. Yet, a solely qualitative approach has its own limitations in generalization. Within the current study, to explore the theoretical background of the influence of multilingualism on self-concept, and linked politically sensitive issues, have been utilized both, qualitative- and quantitative-grounded articles. The first ones provide a valuable descriptive framework, whereas the other – objective statistical data. Nevertheless, the ideology of psychology as a positive science states that even subjective phenomena, as far as they can be measured, can be recorded and unified. Unfortunately, the universalization of objective and subjective matters in psychology is the biggest challenge to address. Despite this fact, as it may be seen in the current study, the attended research with all its imperfections can provide scientifically significant insights for future works. Within the current study we explored the complexity and multifactorial nature of the cultural and linguistic aspects of human life, along with its psychologically embedded sensitiveness.

Until now, the research has been anthropologically-oriented, which means that the figure of the researcher itself has been completely neglected. However, arguing the matter of cultural and ideological sensitivity, we must not escape the thought that the personality of a researcher may also be a part of the equation. Berger (2015) highlighted this point and conceptualized it further, providing the vital insight for any researcher working with sensitive topics. The author argued that those who attend the research should also pay extra attention to their own behavior, background, and perception of the participants within the qualitative study. This insight is especially valid for the current study, designed with the special attention to local specifics and evidences of Azerbaijani researcher's qualitative experience. Furthermore, the following practical recommendations on educational policies should also be formulated with due reflexivity in personal outlooks. Addressing this challenge, the study paid due attention to balance the presentation of any topic that can be sensitive, presenting both seemingly objective global evidence along with local perception and interests.

### **2.3.2. Reframing Data through a Contextual Psychological Lens**

Due to the mentioned restriction in the empirical research realization, have been taken the decision has been made to shift the perspective of the study to contextual comprehension of both global and local evidence of the multilingualism impact, supported by existing theoretical conceptions. Instead of contributing to the underdeveloped field with new but hardly objective empirical data, the study addresses the actual need in preliminary contextual interpretation of already gathered theoretical and empirical experience, developing it into a methodological model for future studies.

By now, the research utilized local and global data on the related topic, supplying it with the comprehension of its value for the subject of Psychology through the concepts of self-esteem and aspiration. This level of epistemological contextualization is followed by the second parallel level – contextualization of Azerbaijani specifics. As it has been mentioned above, the methodological flaw originates in the neglect of the national, personal, and interpersonal factors. Assessed localization of those factors spotlights the critical third variables, which can drastically reduce the validity of the analysis. Regrettably, the underdeveloped psychological instruments are not adequate enough to “capture things as they are” within so complex system of considerations these days. Facing this substitutional systematic obstacle in previous sections, the following sections are determined to suggest the potential solutions that potentially may provide adequate validity of the results of a study on the current topic.

### **2.4. Methodological Innovations Addressing Psychological Complexity of Multilingual Environment**

This chapter motivates research design expansion to better understand the detailed realities of multilingual education, especially in underrepresented settings such as Azerbaijan, when faced sociolinguistic complexity and institutional specifics. The chapter promotes research methods that combine participatory approaches with mixed-methods to study contexts through lived experiences and inclusive epistemology.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods using longitudinal and ethnographic approaches of the projected future design has the potential provide a more detailed understanding of language development and its effects on socioeconomic outcomes.

The second section of 2.4.2 presents Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach as a research model that pays the special attention to marginalized group and gives priority to community members' knowledge. These frameworks avoid the direct extracting knowledge from participants, instead participate discussion and vision sharing. That responsive qualitative approach is perceived to be perspective in multilingual environment with stratified populations, while standard metrics do not accurately capture actual language usage and aspirations in its personal significance.

#### **2.4.1. Mixed Methods and Longitudinal Designs**

Researchers can achieve better outcomes by implementing mixed-methods research that unites quantitative statistical breadth with qualitative interpretive depth. The combination of ethnographic observation with interviews, discourse analysis, and survey-based instruments provides the opportunity for researchers to discover the local psychological specifics in the perception and comprehension of sensitive topics.

According to Hornberger (2016), the “continua of biliteracy” framework offers essential value for researchers who want to observe linguistic development across context-media and content axes. Research models that avoid standardization help create localized testing methods that accurately depict the active nature of language learning and application in mixed sociolinguistic settings. These research approaches could identify competencies and decision-making abilities of Azerbaijani children, which standard testing methods cannot detect because their multilingual abilities typically stem from family environments and contextual situations.

The use of extensive data collections alongside sequential monitoring enables researchers to study the development of language practices throughout time and their connection to socioeconomic factors. Research practices based on large datasets and longitudinal studies are increasingly adopted worldwide to establish correlations between language background, academic achievement, and labor market mobility, as well as psychosocial well-being.

However, the implementation of big data systems might be associated with several dangerous consequences, especially in sensitive national questions. Large-scale correlations become problematic when they lack proper context, since they may solidify existing social inequalities by portraying them as unchangeable natural phenomena. Data infrastructures function as mirrors of the institutional priorities, limitations, and ignored information that their

creators involuntary. The lack of language-specific educational data across different populations in Azerbaijan stands as a primary obstacle to conducting this research. Nevertheless, the data should be supplemented by thorough commentaries to avoid potential antagonization and further misinterpretation.

#### **2.4.2. Participatory and Contextual Research**

The third alternative research methods focus on participatory methods, which center the viewpoints of students and teachers together with community members. Participatory Action Research (PAR) describes a method where traditional research participants gain full participation in study design and data analysis as well as implementation activities. According to Chevalier and Buckles (2019), PAR functions as both a research methodology and an epistemological framework that contests traditional power structures in knowledge development. PAR allows participants to help define research questions while analyzing data and creating interactions that provide knowledge development that represents real-life experiences and local area expertise. The method proves essential in multilingual education sites since it reveals hidden linguistic capacities alongside strengths and oppositional responses that standard testing methods miss. Through this approach, community members gain special significance as actors who can contribute to the visibility of their opinion within the stratified system, in which their marginalization made them silent and underrepresented.

Such approaches would show exceptional value in Azerbaijani rural communities and underrepresented areas because language use patterns in these locations do not match official classification systems. The combination of youth participation in research alongside classroom ethnographic research and visual digital storytelling methods would produce more detailed descriptions about how language creates identity and aspirations

None of these approaches is without challenges. Conducting mixed-methods designs requires substantial training, along with financial support and ethical safeguards must accompany big data approaches and participatory methods need institutions to be adaptable and sustain collaborative efforts. These approaches provide research tools to identify educational research shortcomings and develop context-sensitive knowledge about multilingual education that promotes inclusivity.

The following chapter utilizes these findings to establish practical proposals for upcoming investigations and policy-making initiatives in Azerbaijan.

### **CHAPTER III. ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH DATA WITHIN PILOT PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY ON LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION, SELF-ESTEEM AND ASPIRATIONS**

This section reveals the pilot-model study design with specific details about its structure, sampling procedures, applied tools, key findings supplied by interpretation, and methodological insights. The study presents a limited scope yet retains analytical worth by illustrating the real-world implementation process of empirical research, contributing the theoretical and methodological findings presented in previous chapters. Within the current empirical study have been utilized Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Appendix 1), that had been calculated and interpreted according to the standardized instruction using Guttman scale. Expectation and Aspirations Scale (EAS) (Appendix 2) results have been presented ordinally and taken as group factors. The created questionnaire (Appendix 3) consists of both, categorical variables, such as demographic data and Likert-scale responses, along with quantitative indexes, e.g. the scale of perceived social status in different environmental scales. All data has been gathered consensually, according to the ethical standards of the Code of Conduct. The corresponding instructions and consent document (Appendix 4) have been provided to the students and confirmed. The procedure and study design has been approved by the Ethic Committee protocol №2024/25-2. The statistical analysis performed with IBM SPSS Statistics 26.

#### **3.1 Purpose and Psychological Scope of the Pilot Study**

Although the initial design of this study envisioned a comparative, cross-sectoral analysis across Azerbaijani-, Russian-, and English-medium schools, institutional restrictions limited data collection to a single English-language private secondary school. Despite its narrow scope, the pilot research fulfilled a crucial task: it tested the applicability of the research instruments, explored the cultural and epistemological relevance of psychological constructs such as self-esteem and aspiration in a local setting, and provided baseline empirical data within a high-prestige linguistic environment.

The main objective of this pilot research study consisted of two separate elements. First, the study evaluated whether English instruction affected students' self-esteem perceptions alongside their educational and socioeconomic ambitions. Secondly, the study evaluated how suitable standardized psychological tests are for implementation within educational environments that use multiple languages and display symbolic social hierarchy. The study

functioned simultaneously as a diagnostic tool and a theoretical framework to improve research design for future studies.

The research implemented three essential research tools, including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Appendix 1), alongside a customized aspiration questionnaire presented in their original English format (Appendix 2). The instruments were supported by a brief questionnaire (Appendix 3) that collected information about socioeconomic background, together with students' perceptions of their linguistic abilities and their personal perception of the socioeconomic value of Azerbaijani, Russian, and English languages. While the research sample was confined to a privileged educational setting, it provided a valuable window into the identity formation and motivational landscape of students whose language of instruction is most closely associated with upward mobility and global capital.

### **3.2. Participants and Procedure**

The pilot research included twenty-two students who studied at a private English-sector secondary school located in Baku and were between 16 and 18 years old. Access to this institution was facilitated through institutional academic networks. Student's participation is fully voluntarily and consensual. The research constraints prevented data collection from Azerbaijani- and Russian-sector schools during this research phase, thus restricting sectoral comparison.

All participants completed the survey instruments in English. No translated versions of the tools were employed, as the linguistic environment of the school and the language proficiency of its students allowed for the use of English-only materials. The instruments consisted of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and a short aspirations questionnaire adapted from existing psychological frameworks to reflect local educational trajectories. Data collection was conducted via Google Forms, allowing for efficient and standardized distribution, completion, and storage of responses. The survey link was distributed, and students were given time during school hours to complete the forms. The online format enabled ease of access and anonymity.

The research procedure followed ethical standards by getting informed consent from participants while maintaining anonymity and secure data storage. The pilot study provided valuable information about field implementation procedures and English-dominant schooling patterns, although its small sample size and limited institutional scope restrict generalization.

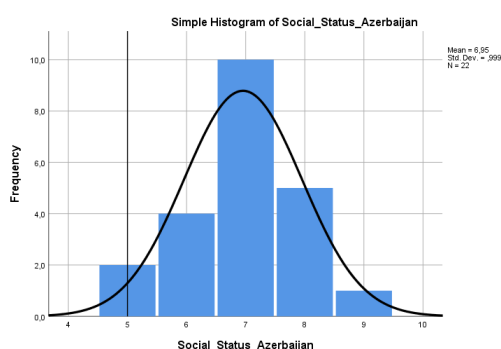


The research results hold particular significance for Azerbaijan because English serves as a status marker for elite groups and international connections.

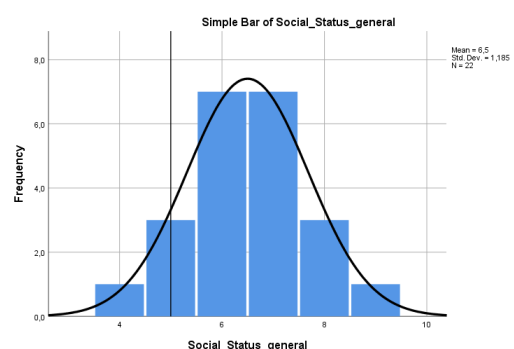
### 3.3. Key Psychological Patterns and Interpretative Insights

Despite the limitations related to sample representativeness, the results of this pilot empirical study allow us to identify several significant associations that illustrate how students perceive language as a factor of educational and social advancement. Students' belief related to the need for Russian language proficiency for life realization shows strong statistical relationships with multiple other variables, such as learned language numbers, self-assessed Russian language skills, and future education plans.

Before proceeding to the correlational analysis, it is worth mentioning descriptive outlines. The mean age of participants is equal to 16.6, whereas 41% of them are women. Averagely the students have more than 2 family members, and the summary income  $m = 1574.85$  manat/month, converting the reported jobs of the parent(s) by the State Statistical Committee of the Republic Azerbaijan (Average monthly nominal wages and salaries of employees by economic activity and sex (2023)). The mean indexes of self-reported social status are exceeding the average meaning (5) and vary from 6.5 for general (Figure 3.3.1), to 6.95 for Azerbaijan (Figure 3.3.2). This may indicate that the perception of “general” of the participants is not limited by their habitus.

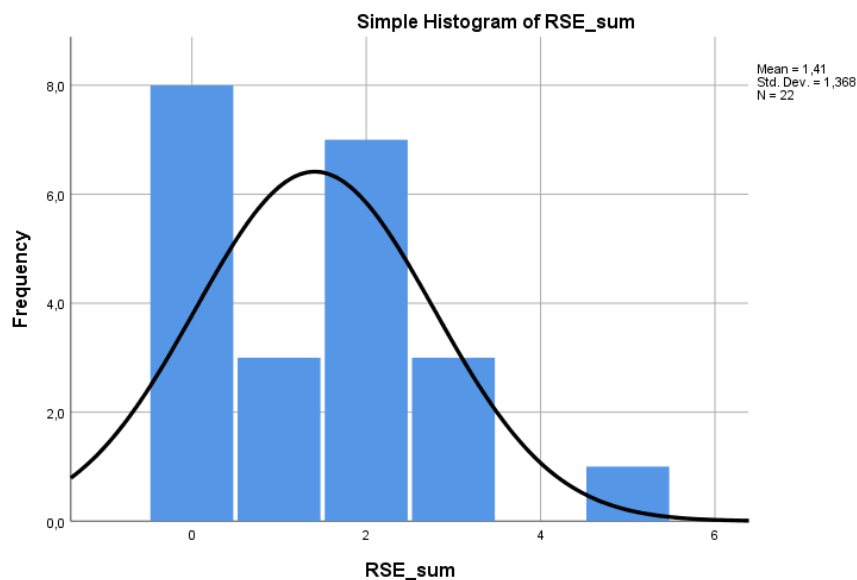


**Figure 3.3.1**  
**Social Status (Azerbaijan) Self-Report Indexes Histogram**

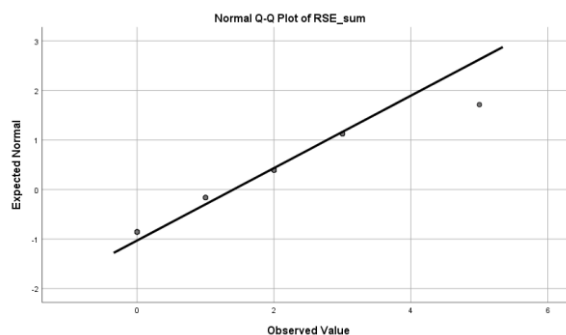


**Figure 3.3.2**  
**Social Status (General) Self-Report Indexes Histogram**

The majority (12/22) of participants agree with the point that education is the crucial determinant of future income, whereas 13 participants reported that they agree that education is a significant factor in self-development. Averagely participants mastered 2.59 languages, which indicates a higher overall linguistic proficiency. The self-report comprehension of Azerbaijani among students was  $m = 2.59$  (out of 3), whereas Russian was  $m = 2$ . The dominant (15) part of students reported the usage of Azerbaijani at home, while with peers they utilize  $n=9$  English,  $n=8$  Azerbaijani,  $n=5$  Russian. This evidence vividly represents the predicted alternative linguistic hierarchy associated with the English-sector institution. The balance of responses on the necessity of mastering a particular language to achieve success in Azerbaijan is as follows: Azerbaijani  $m=2.45$  (whereas 3 is maximum importance, and 0 is absolute denying of any importance), English  $m=1.73$ , and Russian  $m=1.68$ . As can be seen, the perceived role of Azerbaijani is domineering, while English and Russian languages are nearly equally important for the students' aspirations. Addressing academic aspirations, 8 students would like to achieve the degree of Bachelor, 4 are inspired by a Master's degree, and 6 would like to reach a doctoral or equivalent status in their life. Yet, expectancies are predictably humbler: 10 participants expect to achieve a Bachelor's degree, and 7 – a Master's degree. Noticeably, the index of self-esteem in students averagely = 1.41, which is interpreted within Rosenberg's Scale as quite optimistic results, indicating overall high self-esteem among participants. But as it can be noticed (Figure 3.3.3), the results of RSES distributed abnormally with two significant pikes. After excluding extreme value 5 (According to the Turkey criteria ( $Q3 + 1.5 IQR = 5$ ), the value 5 is not an outlier, yet, it is reasonable to exclude it for more representative cluster analysis, considering the number of cases (Figure 3.3.4)). The cluster analysis detected 2 nearly equal distinguishable clusters with centers in value = 0 and value = 2 (Figure 3.3.5). In order to identify the factors associated with cluster membership based on self-esteem levels, an independent-samples t-test was conducted for a range of sociodemographic and educational variables. Marginal differences were observed solely in age ( $p = .076$ ), suggesting that this factor may play a potential role in shaping adolescents' self-esteem profiles. Nevertheless, the target significance of 95% has not been reached, most probably due to the limited sample size.



**Figure 3.3.3**  
**The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale Results Histogram**



**Figure 3.3.4**  
**Normal Q–Q Plot for RSES Results**

Final Cluster Centers		
Cluster		
	1	2
RSE_sum	0	2

Number of Cases in each Cluster		
Cluster	1	2
Valid	11,000	10,000
Missing	21,000	1,000

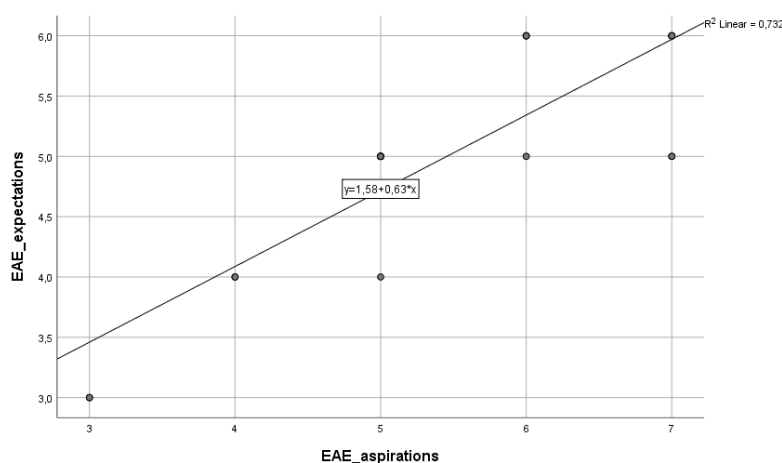
**Figure 3.3.5**  
**Cluster Centers Values & Distributions**

The strongest correlation emerged between the perceived necessity of Russian for success and the self-rated level of Russian language proficiency ( $r = 0.692$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Students might maintain high language proficiency because they already value the language while also seeking better competence because of perceived social importance. Students who learn multiple languages have a statistically significant relationship with the belief that Russian serves as a strategic resource ( $r = 0.594$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ).

This study confirmed the relationship between Russian language importance and educational expectations as statistically significant ( $r = 0.428$ ,  $p = 0.047$ ) while supporting the

notion that students' projected educational paths are associated by the perception of linguistic value. However, the association with aspirational ideals (aspiration) was weaker and not statistically significant ( $r = 0.30$ ,  $p = 0.18$ ), which implies that imagined educational futures are shaped less by language and more by other cultural or psychological factors.

The Aspiration-Expectation scale demonstrated internal consistency, showing a strong positive correlation between the indices of Aspirations and Expectations ( $r = 0.856$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) (Figure 3.3.6)



**Figure 3.3.6**  
**Scatterplot of Expectations and Aspirations**  
**With Linear Regression Line**

The research findings demonstrate that language perception, particularly Russian, affects student evaluations of their future prospects. The system of perceiving language could serve as a hidden process that sustains educational inequality in Azerbaijan's multilingual, stratified educational system.

The pilot study established multiple statistically significant correlations, which indicate potential meaningful relationships between linguistic perception and educational orientation, but these results need careful interpretation. The study results face limitations in generalization because of a small participant number and exclusively English-medium school student representation. Therefore, the consistency of results limited by within-English-group correlations.

The strong correlations between Russian language valuation and self-assessed proficiency could stem from students' shared self-perception rather than actual external factors. Self-reported data contains inherent biases because people tend to respond based on social

expectations, especially when language carries political or ethnic, or ideological significance. The way students answer questions about their aspirations and expectations may be shaped by social expectations and internalized language prestige narratives instead of their actual educational plans.

The weak or non-significant relationship between aspirations and perceived language requirements challenges the idea that language stratification operates deterministically. It is likely that language interacts with other psychological, parental, and institutional variables in more complex ways than this limited design can capture.

The initial research results should be treated as preliminary hypotheses instead of definitive evidence. The results demonstrate the necessity of performing extensive research that includes large participant numbers and extended timeframes, along with culturally appropriate measurement tools and diverse participant representation. Future research needs to combine quantitative data with qualitative findings from interviews or focus groups to understand how students experience language hierarchies in their everyday lives.

### **3.4. Interpreting Self-Esteem and Aspiration Indexes Within the Framework of Psycholinguistic Stratification**

The pilot study findings provide important data points that can be analyzed using the principles of psycholinguistic stratification. Language functions as more than communication as far as it represents both symbolic meaning and material value that articulates and maintains social hierarchies. The Azerbaijani educational system provides a perfect environment for the analysis of the psychological processes of social stratification because it implements multilingual policies through institutional linguistic demarcations that separate different social groups.

The psycholinguistic stratification framework functions through the three core elements of language status, their influence on self-concept, and opportunity structures. Students view Russian and English as important for their future achievements because their internalized social beliefs directly influence their psychological dispositions. The strong correlations between students' predicted needs in Russian language competence for future realization and their self-assessed Russian skills, together with their educational plans and academic potential, demonstrate complete alignment with linguistic capital perceptions. Research supports

theoretical models that show how students internalize linguistic nurturing that eventually reflects in their self-evaluation and planned future direction.

The research results support the concept that language functions as a crucial factor which helps adolescents form their identities while shaping their future ambitions. While the aspirational and self-esteem indices show inconsistent correlations with language value, the findings suggest that linguistic settings play a complex role in shaping students' internalization of status and legitimacy.

The study's generalization limitations need to be evaluated within the established framework. The research sample consists only of English-sector students and examines how these students perceive their position in a high-capital linguistic environment. The student perceptions show the psychological patterns within elite educational tracks but fail to represent nationwide student perspectives. Through their responses students show how the language of instruction shapes their understanding of achievable goals, preferred outcomes and expected results.

In summary, the psycholinguistic stratification framework reveals how educational language policies and school environments silently encode social hierarchies into students' sense of self and projected futures. Future research needs to investigate these language dynamics across multiple educational sectors while employing mixed methods to fully understand how language functions symbolically, cognitively, and affects students in stratified multilingual societies.

### **3.5. Psychological and Methodological Insights from Limited Empirical Evidence**

Despite the clear limitations that constrained the empirical component of this research, the partial dataset and the context of its collection nonetheless provide meaningful insights that contribute both to the theoretical framework and to methodological reflection in the study of language, self-esteem, and aspiration in multilingual educational settings.

The results from this study validate the fundamental idea that language functions as both a communication tool and a social divider, which provides its psychological impacts. Although the sample was small and represented solely English-medium institutions, the consistent correlation between students' Russian proficiency and their perceptions of associated with

Russian importance can be considered as evidence of how perceived value of the language motivates its mastering tendencies.

The research data confirms that psychological orientation regarding the future (as shown through aspirations and expectations) strongly relates to the way students evaluate their linguistic capital. This affirms the notion that symbolic value attributed to specific languages manifests not only in labor market outcomes but also in early self-evaluation processes. The preliminary findings verify that sociolinguistic systems influence personal developmental paths, which provides empirical evidence for Bourdieu's, along with Flores and Rosa's and Duchêne and Heller's theoretical frameworks.

The research process reveals essential methodological lessons for studying sensitive language-based stratification topics. The difficulties encountered with instrument adaptation demonstrate the absolute requirement of thorough cultural and linguistic validation when conducting research across different contexts. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale requires more than translation to measure self-worth and success concepts because cultural meanings differ between regions. The materials used in the pilot-testing materials are insufficient and generally inefficient within the framework of the global study. While the testing materials are addressing the descriptive and experimental nature of the current study, further research should rely on a well-prepared methodological and instrumental basis. The solutions suggested in the previous chapter can be implemented.

Namely, addressing the gaps of the current research, there can be spotlighted the following notions. The income of householding requires further detailization to provide the perceived data for future comparative research among different socioeconomic and linguistic populations. A fully self-assessed report on socioeconomic perception can be prone to being biased and requires a professional qualitative interview supplement. To capture the linguistic trends in detail, it is worth substituting the method of self-report on linguistic fluency with professional objective linguistic tests. While that instrumental sophistication was excessive for the pilot-testing, it is required for the full-scale empirical research to achieve generalization value.

## RESULTS

This chapter summarizes the theoretical findings, empirical evidence and policy recommendations from the study to present a complete analysis of instructional language effects on psychological and socioeconomic results. The research reaffirms the Bourdieu's linguistic capital theory by analyzing language, social stratification, and their psychological impact in Azerbaijani education system through extended interdisciplinary perspectives that included raciolinguistic ideologies, market language utility and educational gentrification.

The field implementation faced institutional and cultural obstacles yet showed both potential and limitations of using Western-derived psychometric tools in post-Soviet multilingual environments. The data revealed essential patterns showing how instruction language affects students' self-esteem and academic ambitions even though the research faced various limitations.

The policy-oriented discussion contributed the research findings with practical recommendations of establishment an equitable language education policy. The recommendations call for bilingual teacher training expansion, equitable curriculum development and systematic support for Azerbaijani-medium schools together with strategic Russian and English instruction implementation across different regions. This study demonstrates the need for culturally specific interdisciplinary methods to study and solve language-based educational inequalities while providing both theoretical progress and practical advice for future Azerbaijani educational reforms and similar educational systems.

**Integrative Theoretical Reflections on Language and Self-Concept.** The theoretical foundation of this research explores the intersectional nature of language, identity, and socioeconomic stratification in a multilingual society. The research was built on Bourdieu's linguistic capital theory to examine how language serves as both a communication method and a social asset that controls institutional advantages and personal self-image. The theoretical framework expanded through the addition of recent market language utility research by Gazzola, Duchêne, and Heller, together with raciolinguistic ideologies conceptualized by Flores and Rosa, and educational gentrification phenomenon presented by Delavan, each of which provided insight into how language hierarchies are reproduced across global, post-Soviet, and local Azerbaijani contexts.



The theoretical examination showed that instruction language affects the vital students' psychometrics of self-esteem and aspirations through its social position and opportunities, internalized value within stratified sociolinguistic systems. The research demonstrated that symbolic language hierarchies in education affect adolescent psychosocial growth because this developmental stage receives a strong institutional impact on identity and ambition formation. The reviewed literature demonstrated that these effects are neither universal nor culturally neutral, hence, researchers should comprehend the sociopolitical and historical context of any particular studied population.

The Azerbaijani case was conceptualized as an illustrative site where three coexisting instructional languages - Azerbaijani, Russian, and English - possess different levels of symbolic value. The linguistic tracks function beyond educational choices because they create social pathways that affect students' self-perception and their ability to envision their future. The theoretical findings support the psychological importance of instruction language while demonstrating why research needs to be culturally specific and interdisciplinary to understand language-stratification-adolescent psychological development relationships.

Reflections on the Pilot Study: Contextual Challenges and Psychological Insights. The practical application of this study in the Azerbaijani context was shaped by both conceptual ambition and structural limitations. As it has been presented in the methodological chapter, the research design initially relied on a quantitative approach to measure the impact of language of instruction on self-esteem and socioeconomic aspiration among students. Unforeseeable institutional constraints, which included restricted school access, administrative inertia, and limitations on data collection, motivated an alteration of the former field strategy. The research developed into a dual-method approach that merged quantitative measurement with the following methodological and epistemological instructions for the future comprehensive study design.

The implementation of standardized measurement instruments like the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale adaptation, along with aspiration assessment items, faced problems during the process of linguistic and cultural adaptation. Tools that emerged from the Western epistemological contexts require both validation and interpretive attention when they are applied in the multilingual post-Soviet setting. The methodological research revealed that strict psychometric procedures are culturally inadequate to detect the complex symbolic and affective elements that emerged from Azerbaijani language hierarchies in educational settings. Empirical

measurement received additional support through contextual interpretation, which included both participant response analysis and secondary sociolinguistic data examination.

The fieldwork exposed fundamental inequalities between Azerbaijani-, Russian-, and English-sector schools associated with different accessibility and economic census. Quantitative data made it possible to identify the patterns in student self-assessment of competence and ambition, yet qualitative reflection revealed the meaning behind these observed disparities. Educational inequality reproduction requires a further critical analysis of material and language-based expectation systems.

The field research demonstrated the importance of the researcher's self-awareness in the sensitive for local population matters. Research reflexivity was integrated into the future research methodology, so field experiences could provide the insights for the epistemological framework beyond testing its components. The research process revealed essential findings about conducting psychological studies in multilingual societies with linguistic stratification through limited data, while demonstrating both potential and boundaries.

Implications for Educational Policy and Adolescent Wellbeing. This section draws from the research data along with its restrictions to create recommendations that promote inclusive language education for Azerbaijan. The proposed solutions draw from presented international, local experience as well as research findings.

Within the considered data, we can suggest the potential benefits of the strategy of transition from symbolic linguistic diversity recognition into practical, equitable multilingual implementation in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani-language schools in rural areas should receive infrastructure support to shorten the drastic gap in capital between rural Azerbaijani-sector and urban Russian-, English-sector schools. UNESCO (2025) emphasizes that true equity requires differentiated support to address historical and systemic disparities. Therefore, the curriculum can vary, addressing national interests, but not be exclusive opportunities providers.

Teachers need professional bilingual pedagogy training alongside curricular materials available in all official languages, minority languages. Moreover, schools must have policy tools to create localized language strategies according to community requirements. The system of decentralized language management adopted by Switzerland parallels this approach.

Policymakers need to take concrete measures to understand how linguistic capital affects socioeconomic conditions. The job market, as it is widely accepted, rewards Russian and English speakers with significantly higher returns than speakers of other languages. Public investment should focus on developing English and Russian instruction within Azerbaijani-medium schools throughout underfunded regions to prevent these languages from becoming available only to those from affluent backgrounds, providing mobility paths.

The language planning process should include scholarship programs with specific targets and university admission policies that value linguistic diversity alongside employer benefits for hiring graduates with various language abilities. Such strategy of consistent support of language value can short a gap between associated with languages opportunities, and consequently, mitigate following feeling of inferiority and psychological distress in students of less socioeconomically perspective languages.

Azerbaijan needs to establish an integrated bilingual policy that supports multilingual competence without compromising the symbolic and civic positions of the Azerbaijani language. The solution should reject subtractive models and instead adopt additive bilingualism to benefit personal and societal development. The French immersion program in Canada provides a rich experience in the implementation of the strategy aimed at enhancing linguistic opportunities without compromising cultural heritage. Contributing the Swiss and South African approach of regional inclusion also prevents the antagonization between languages to form.

These policy directions (thoroughly developed and modeled) could provide an effective path for Azerbaijan to develop its multilingual education system into a more inclusive, socially just, and aspirational framework.

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79. Zolotareva, A. (2020). Validity and reliability of the Russian version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. *Herald of Omsk University. Series: Psychology*, 2, 52–57. <https://doi.org/10.24147/2410-6364.2020.2.52-57> (in Russian)

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)**

Please record the appropriate answer for each item, depending on whether you Strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with it.

- 1 = Strongly agree  
2 = Agree  
3 = Disagree  
4 = Strongly disagree

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. At times I think I am no good at all.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I certainly feel useless at times.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I feel that I'm a person of worth.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

## Educational Aspirations and Expectation

### Original Survey Items

#### Educational Aspirations:

**1) How far would you LIKE to go in school?**

**(CIRCLE ONLY ONE)**

- Less than High School Graduation .....1
- High School Graduation Only .....2
- Less than 2 Years of College, Vocational, or Business School .....3
- Two or More Years of College Including a 2-Year Degree .....4
- Finish College (4 or 5 Year Degree) .....5
- Master's Degree or Equivalent .....6
- Ph.D., M.D., or other Professional Degree .....7

#### Educational Expectations:

**2) Realistically speaking, how far do you THINK you will get in school?**

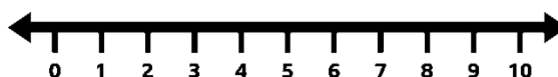
**(CIRCLE ONLY ONE)**

- Less than High School Graduation .....1
- High School Graduation Only .....2
- Less than 2 Years of College, Vocational, or Business School .....3
- Two or More Years of College Including a 2-Year Degree .....4
- Finish College (4 or 5 Year Degree) .....5
- Master's Degree or Equivalent .....6
- Ph.D., M.D., or other Professional Degree .....7

### Appendix 3

1. Sex (underline) *Male/Female*
2. Age \_\_\_\_\_
3. The year of education in school \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many family members do you live with? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is the occupation of your father? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is the occupation of your mother? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Is there anyone who also work in your home? (If any, note the job title)  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Note (circle) your perceived disposition on the scale of social status among your peers **in general** (5 = average social status):



9. Note (circle) your perceived disposition on the scale of social status among your peers **in your school** (5 = average social status):



10. Note (circle) your perceived disposition on the scale of social status **in Azerbaijan as a whole** (5 = average social status):



11. How do you think education determines your further income? (underline)  
*absolutely irrelevant / insignificantly / significantly / the major factor*
12. How do you think education determines your self-development? (underline)  
*absolutely irrelevant / insignificantly / significantly / the major factor*
13. How many languages you can fluently speak? \_\_\_\_\_
14. How many languages you cannot fluently speak, but you study currently / studied before? \_\_\_\_\_
15. What is your level of Russian language? (underline) (you can underline as many options as you need)  
*I can read Russian / I can understand what people say in Russian / I can speak Russian*

16. What is your level of Azerbaijani language? (underline) (you can underline as many options as you need)

*I can read Azerbaijani / I can understand what people say in Azerbaijani / I can speak Azerbaijani*

17. Which language do you primarily speak at your home? (underline)

*Azerbaijani / Russian / Both equally / Other (\_\_\_\_\_)*

18. Which language do you primarily speak with your friends (underline)

*Azerbaijani / Russian / Both equally / Other (\_\_\_\_\_)*

19. Do you agree with the statement: "The language is a sign of privilege / social status"? (underline)

*Strongly Disagree / Disagree / Agree / Strongly Agree*

20. Do you agree with the statement: "I have to know Azerbaijani language to reach my goals (social and economic) in life living in Azerbaijan"?

*Strongly Disagree / Disagree / Agree / Strongly Agree*

21. Do you agree with the statement: "I have to know Russian language to reach my goals (social and economic) in life living in Azerbaijan"?

*Strongly Disagree / Disagree / Agree / Strongly Agree*

22. Do you agree with the statement: "I have to know English language to reach my goals (social and economic) in life living in Azerbaijan"?

*Strongly Disagree / Disagree / Agree / Strongly Agree*

**TITLE OF STUDY**

Impact of Education Language on Self-Esteem and Socioeconomic Aspiration

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

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**PURPOSE OF STUDY**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is to discover the correlations between the language of education in Azerbaijan and self-esteem, and socioeconomic self-perception of students to track the potential factor of personal development in Azerbaijan as the actors of society

**STUDY PROCEDURES**

You will be asked to answer the given questionnaire genuinely and responsibly on 34 in total. The questions do not require any specific knowledge, and will take approximately 10 minutes. Those questions aimed to provide information about a student regarding his/her social and economic status of the family, personal aspirations for the future, self-esteem, and minimal personal information (sex, age). Afterward you submit the answers, your blanks will be codified and prepared for the statistical analysis, reliably preserving any of your information with several levels of security, even if none of your contact information is asked in your tests. After the analysis will be completed, the results will be applied to compare this data with already existing, theoretical comprehension, and suggestions for the further researches.

**RISKS**

None of foreseeable risks are expected. And nevertheless, you may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

**BENEFITS**

There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, we hope that the information obtained from this study may provide the valuable insight about the de-facto influence of the Azerbaijani or Russian language-oriented education in Azerbaijan for the policymakers, parents, and students



## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your responses to this questionnaire will be anonymous. Please do not write any identifying information on your blanks. OR For the purposes of this research study, your comments will not be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

State measures taken to ensure confidentiality, such as those listed below:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.
- All digitalized files will be preserved in passworded archives, saved on the protected cloud-disk with double verification

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Investigator, please contact the Institutional Review Board at (865) 354-3000, ext. 4822.

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

## **CONSENT**

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Abstract

**Relevance of the Topic and Extent of Its Previous Research.** This current master's thesis investigates how instruction language affects self-esteem and socio-economic aspirations of students within the multilingual education system of Azerbaijan. The study investigates psychological development of adolescents based on the symbolic and socioeconomic value of Azerbaijani, Russian, and English in an educational system that operates within Soviet linguistic frameworks and modern globalization processes. The last existent multilingualism research trajectories are rather focused on the neurocognitive, academic performance, and socioeconomic outcomes, while psychological factor is predominately understudied. However, well-developed theoretical component of socioeconomical significance of language-factor (Bourdieu, 1991), as well as its influence on self-concept (e.g. Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Hamman-Ortiz & Palmer, 2020; Khattab, 2015), supported by modern local Azerbaijani observations (e.g., Akyıldız, 2019; Abdurahmanova, 2023; Bogdanova, 2022), and valuable methodological notions (e.g., Hambleton & Zenisky, 2010; Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; Blommaert, 2015), provided a fertile basis for psychological holistic conceptualization within the current study.

**Object and Subject of the Research.** The object of this research is psychological development among secondary education students within Azerbaijani, English, and Russian language of instruction. The subject is the influence of instructional language on self-esteem, academical expectations and aspirations, social self-positioning, and perception of language within its socioeconomic significance in Azerbaijan.

**Purpose and Objectives of the Study.** This study aims to verify whether students in Russian and English schools have better self-esteem together with academic aspirations comparing to Azerbaijani-speaking students. The study hypothesizes that these differences are linked to symbolic value and socioeconomic prospects associated with each language. Four intersectional hypotheses were tested concerning self-esteem and aspirational advantages of Russian and English language streams, the mediating role of perceived language prestige.

**Research Methods.** The research used validated psychological tools (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale), a language background and Socioeconomic Status (SES) questionnaire, and a locally adapted aspirations inventory. Due to administrative restrictions and limited access, a full-scale study was replaced with a pilot study in one private English-medium institution. The sample of 22 students has been analyzed and the achieved results contributed the theoretical and

methodological comprehension, developed in the Chapter I and Chapter II. All data had been gathered according to the standards of Ethic Code of Conduct, and with official allowance of The Ethic Committee (Protocol №2024/25-2).

**Scientific Novelty and Applicability.** This thesis contributes original insights into the psychometrics of multilingual education, with due consideration of crucial third variables (Socioeconomic and sociolinguistic stratification; historical and cultural specifics). The study develops a theoretical framework using the concept of linguistic capital (Bourdieu) and market utility (Gazzola & Wickström) and applies it to the Azerbaijani educational context. Methodologically the study evaluates the application of standardized psychological tools in multiple cultural environments while presenting new interpretation methods for diverse cultural settings. Besides providing theoretical and methodological insights for the future comprehensive study, the work analyzes the international governmental policies of resolving the negative outcomes of multilingualism, directly impacting psychological well-being of students. Utilizing this experience, the suggestions for language strategies in Azerbaijan environment provided, focusing on self-identity integrity, and psychological well-being of students.

**Summary of Empirical Findings.** Descriptive statistics and correlational analysis from the pilot study illustrate student perceptions in English-medium settings and provide a foundation for further comparative analysis. The data highlight the psychological significance of symbolic language hierarchies and point to measurable impacts on adolescent aspiration and linguistic value conceptualization. Taken with due statistical caution, the results support the theoretical and methodological findings, empirically present potential and actual problematic points related to intersectional complexity of the topic and epistemological susceptibility.

**Conclusion.** The research proves that instructional language serves as an essential socioeconomic and symbolic element which influences adolescent mental development within stratified educational systems. It calls for longitudinal mixed-models research, instrument adaptation, and language policy reform grounded in both local data and international models (e.g., Switzerland, Canada, South Africa). Combination of theoretical, methodological, empirical comprehension of the topic of the influence of multilingualism on self-esteem and aspiration, with due considerations of environmental reality and scientific challenges, establishes both theoretical foundations and methodological frameworks for upcoming studies and educational planning policies that aim to mitigate negative impact of linguistic stratification on the psychological well-being of population