

# Internationalization of education system of Kazakhstan in conditions of transformation: Evaluating concepts, challenges, and strategies

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Current objective of Kazakhstan in the sphere of education is to join to the arena of international education and to align goals and strategies of educational policy with those of the countries of Eurasian community. National educational systems that take leading roles in the international comparative studies represent a great interest in international practice. President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev set the task of exchanging scientific personnel and training of intellectually gifted young people at prestigious universities abroad. Particular attention was paid to inclusive educational policies, processes of identification and assessment, to overall policy co-ordination for the provision of education services, to integration in mainstream education, as well as to good practices and to the role of NGOs and donor community.

**Keywords:** Social institutions, higher education, Bologna Process, international scholarship "Bolashak", lifelong learning, educational system, international educational space

## Ensuring the effective integration of Kazakhstan to global community

Educational reforms, training, and human resource development are integral areas of the transition towards a democratic society and a market economy. Kazakhstan has made progress in all these areas since the beginning of the reform in 1990. The challenge for the Ministry of Education and Science has been to promote and support changes that meet the needs of both new economy and society and the interests of all in the face of a shortage of financial and human resources. Particular attention is paid to inclusive education policies, overall policy co-ordination for the provision of education services, integration in mainstream education, as well as to good practices and the role of NGOs and donor community. UNESCO's Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011 notes that Kazakhstan takes the top fourth position among 129 countries in terms of education development index.

The participation in international researches gains a great contribution for the educational system of Kazakhstan. Currently, Kazakhstan is taking part in two large comparative studies such as TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment). "The main criterion of the success of the educational reforms is the situation when any citizen of our country, who obtains education and qualification in Kazakhstan, can become a specialist and professional in any country of the world. We have to ensure that services of education are provided all over the country at the level of world standards," said the President of the country Nursultan Nazarbaev. 2011 was marked as the beginning of the implementation of state programs on education and healthcare development. Implementation of education development programs aims to build and develop such a system of education that will ensure the establishment of competitive qualitative human resources potential. In this

context, the national educational systems demonstrating advanced standards and leading roles in the international comparative studies represent great interest in international practice. The State Program on Education Development for 2011-2020 notes that Kazakhstan will participate in international studies of educational quality, such as in PIRLS, TIMSS ADVANCED, and ICILS.

Joining of the country to Bologna process triggered transformations influencing the position that national educational system. At this stage, this process has contributed to creating conditions for the export of educational services and to free migration of students, undergraduates, and of intellectual elite of Kazakhstan. Principal directions of higher education reforms were determined as the following:

- Provision of new insights into the quality of education, including knowledge transfer and competence development
- Clear understanding of national educational goals and expected results set in all levels of lifelong learning and expressed in developing the training programs in the content of textbooks, handouts, and teaching materials, projects
- Decentralization, distribution of responsibilities of state educational authorities.

Kazakhstan's educational priorities at the present stage are defined as follows:

- Continuity at all levels of education
- Preserving the fundamental nature of education in the context of its practical orientation
- Profilization of the high school
- Maintaining morally, spiritually, and physically healthy young generation
- Interactivity in the learning process
- Tools and techniques assessing the competence of the youth
- Scientific and methodological support of educational process
- Personnel (selection, training, and retraining).

The state of national education in Kazakhstan and its development trends in interregional and international comparative aspects are presented annually in the National Report. Due to the stability and economic development, Kazakhstan is increasing budget spending on education projects and needs. Special attention is paid to the development of advanced learning technologies as the result of which over 50% of schools in the country have interactive classrooms. Availability of computers at schools has reached 18 students per 1 computer. Kazakhstan is actively positioning itself in the international educational space. For the first time in 2009 the human development index of Kazakhstan reached the level of countries with high level of the indicator.

### **Outcome of reforms in the field of education of Kazakhstan**

The development of external cooperation in the field of education and with foreign partners has become possible after gaining of independence. During the short period of Kazakhstan's community development, international cooperation in the field of education has undergone significant changes in its essence, objectives, goals, and organizational and legal norms. Three key stages of external cooperation development in the field of education can be distinguished as the following: late 70's - early 90's - pre-independence period; first half of 90's - formation period; second half of 90's - optimization period.

The first Kazakh experience in the field of development of external cooperation in the field of education in 70's-80's was strictly regulated by normative acts of USSR

which aimed to maintain the ideological and political goals and tasks of the former super-power. The overall context of external cooperation development in the field of education during that period met the requirements of communist ideological expansion and worldwide application of the Russian language. The system of education for foreign citizens provided for one-year learning of the Russian language in preparatory faculties.

Summarizing the development of external cooperation during "pre-independence" period, the following can be mentioned:

- This cooperation was fragmented and composed negligible part of the entire system of international cooperation in humanitarian sector of former USSR
- External cooperation was strictly regulated
- Activities, designed to develop external cooperation in the field of education, enhanced development of international cooperation in humanitarian sector, but contradicted to declared objectives, providing for expansion of Communist ideas.

External cooperation development in the field of education and with foreign partners became possible after Kazakhstan had gained independence. In the first half of the 90s, Kazakhstan signed the first agreements on educational cooperation. Mainly, they related to cooperation in the field of higher education.

In early 90's it became obvious that governmental objectives in the field of political, social, and economic reforms could not be achieved by existing level of knowledge and competences of specialists and staff. Presidential Decree of 3rd November 1993 introduced "Bolashak" international scholarships to train specialists abroad. For the first time in the history of CIS countries talented young people were provided with an opportunity to acquire education in leading countries of the world at the country's expense. It should be noted that in the subsequent years this practice was introduced by leaderships of other CIS countries.

Establishment of a new (for a young country) type of international relations in the field of education was a pre-requisite to ensure the Republic's equal joining to the global community. Therefore, by mid-90s, over 40 intergovernmental and interdepartmental agreements were signed. In addition, educational institutions of Kazakhstan signed over 70 direct cooperation agreements with foreign partners.

Lessons learnt in the first half of the 90s (both positive and negative) allowed to address the issues of cooperation establishment and development more thoroughly including that one in the field of education. Currently, the key objective of international cooperation is to optimize organizational and technical activities, to study the capacity of foreign partners and to ensure the practical fusion of internal needs with real external opportunities.

During the years of independence thousands of young people were educated in prestigious universities abroad. Since 1993 through International Scholarship of the President "Bolashak", higher educational establishments in Europe, North America, Russia, Australia, and Asia have received about three thousand young Kazakhs. An analogue of such a program in the CIS does not exist. This educational initiative of the state primarily aimed on training specialists in various areas in the social and engineering sciences for the state government. The strategic goal of the project was to increase human resource capacity of the young state, improve education and competence of the new Kazakh elite. For example, the "Bolashak" ("The Future") program initiated by the President of the country set the task of international exchange of scientific personnel and training intellectually gifted young people at prestigious universities abroad (Ayazbekov, 2006). Under the paternalistic government, general modernization of the country's economy and rapid development of market relations, the Kazakh youth strive to acquire

education in prestigious educational establishments abroad, while not losing their identity as individuals and citizens.

Nowadays, 20 years after the start of the program, the concept of “Bolashak” program looks different. According to the 2004 changes, program rules for admission and selection requirements declined and simultaneously the number of awarded scholarships increased. Last year it was decided to provide the opportunity to study abroad to up to 3000 students annually for higher professional and postgraduate education (bachelor degree, master degree, and PhD). A separate structure was created to administer the “Bolashak” in 2005 under the Ministry of Education and Science, JSC “Center of International Programs”, which was given the task of escorting students at all stages from the time of selection until they receive a diploma from a foreign university.

Best undergraduate and graduate students are sponsored by the State and are trained for free in leading universities and institutes in the world, all expenses for travel, accommodation, and health insurance are also taken over by the state. According to the statements of the government bodies responsible for implementing the program, after graduation, all returnees of “Bolashak” program successfully apply their knowledge, thereby contributing to the growth of technological capabilities of the country. For example, according to information of the Ministry of Education and Science from 1993 to 2010 the number of applicants of “Bolashak” reached 7356 people.

Integration of systems of higher professional education within the Bologna process generates a variety of challenges and issues. First of all, the “brain drain” to the more prestigious economic regions of Europe and other countries that cannot fully get the highly qualified specialists for the development of the domestic economy. This situation forced the government to reconsider the position of ‘Bolashak’ program. Today, the task of Kazakhstan is to join to the international educational space, align their goals, and strategies in educational policy with the countries of the Eurasian community. In this connection a need has grown for state educational standards of the second generation. The original document here is a classifier (list) of specialties, which should take into account the coexistence of traditional (single level) and a three-level (bachelor-master-specialist) training subsystems. This takes into account experience in the development of state standards in different countries (mainly in CIS countries, as they are in similar economic and educational conditions) (Decision No.1720/2006/EC; Klyucharev, 2005).

Development Strategy of Higher Education is a part of the Republican Doctrine of educational policy and includes four items:

- Revision of views on the mission of higher education (role and place in society, strategic goals and objectives)
- Development and adoption of legislative acts on the national policy in the sphere of higher education
- Development a new generation of regulations that implement the goals and objectives of the state general educational policy
- Development and adoption of the concept of structural reform of higher education in the coming years (Kusherbaev, Akhmetov, Abylkasymova, and Rahimbek, 1998).

In the field of higher education an extremely important task is to improve the quality of specialists’ training. In this regard, “New Model of the Enrollment at Public Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Kazakhstan” was developed and approved by the Government. This model, implementation of which began in 1999, has increased the objectivity of knowledge evaluation of applicants to select the most talented young people among those, who enter state

higher institutions (colleges). Now only 20% of university students receive state grants and loans, the rest study on a commercial basis (although most of them are students of economic and legal specialties). In private colleges, as well as in all CIS countries, there are not any specialists majoring in natural sciences and technical professions, because it requires substantial investment. After completing undergraduate level, those who are interested can continue their studies at two year master's programs, whether free or on a commercial basis.

Education institutions face the transformations of educational paradigm. Priority guide for institutions of education is awareness of the need for educational space, which is responsible for the conditions of a developing personality, which transfers the focus from knowledge-centric approach to the results of education (Important issues of the higher education, 1999). As noted by Russian sociologists, new generation of radically transforming societies plays an important role in the reform of society and social transformation. They then came to power as economic, political, and cultural elite. Likewise, they state that the younger generations are mostly supporters of the reforms. Among the young there is a split between traditionalists and pro-Western, which can survive in the coming decades (Bogaevskaya, Danilova, Drobizheva, et al., 2005).

### **Achieving main goals of national education system**

Main trend in development of higher education is improvement of specialists' training quality, provision of new fields of training, innovative development, integration with intensive scientific-research, and industrial activities, closer linking of university research with needs of society based on improvement of educational and information technologies.

The main goals are satisfying needs of society, state, and persons in acquiring high quality higher education and providing every person with broader opportunities in choosing content, forms, and duration of training.

Today the main tasks of the Government cover many ones including the following:

- Training of competitive specialists of a new pattern, who have broad fundamental knowledge and are able to adapt to changing demands of labor market and technologies
- Development of educational programs harmonized in their duration and content
- Strengthening and modernization of material-technical and training-laboratory framework of higher education institutions
- Development and application of progressive educational technologies, including credit and distant technologies
- Involvement of scientific organizations' capacities for training of specialists in higher educational institutions
- Enhancement of motivation within entire system of higher education for delivery of high quality educational services through democratization of educational process
- Preparation of certain universities to accreditation of vocational educational programs in compliance with requirements of leading foreign accreditation agencies
- Creation of conditions for development of elite universities

- Elaboration of new principles of university management, introduction of strategic planning system, quality management system, and independence of universities
- Strengthening students' right for quality education; development and application of mechanisms establishing responsibility of university managers for delivery of quality educational services.

Key element of the new model's implementation shall be teaching staff of new pattern. Training of teaching staff is the priority and backbone sector of Kazakh education.

Training of teaching staff for preschool education in addition to giving major specialty will provide an opportunity of supplementary specialization: teacher psychologist, working with children of preschool age, manager of preschool education, English teacher for children of preschool age, and teacher of extended education. Education programs of preschool teachers should focus on formation of professional skills associated with observing internal condition of children, managing their behavior, programming of personal growth, and knowledge of basics of teaching diagnostics.

Education programs of teaching specialties will be oriented on training of multilingual teacher, fluently speaking at least 3 languages, and having knowledge of innovation teaching technologies. New type of a teacher shall have skills of sourcing, research, and creative activities, latest information and distant technologies of education.

Creation of National System of Education Quality Assessment (NSEQA) will allow the execution of constitutional rights of citizens for quality education, facilitating proper functioning and sustainable development of educational system, and elaboration of development strategy and this social sector. Key principles of NSEQA are unbiased assessment, openness, transparency, regularity, succession, accountability, and continuity.

The main goals of the programme is the achievement of educational quality, ensuring competitiveness of local education and citizens of Kazakhstan in international educational space, and at the labor market through introduction of external objective assessment tools and system of monitoring education.

Creation of NSEQA pre-supposes taking measures for further improvement of the system of licensing, certification, and accreditation of educational organizations, approaches to measuring parameters of education quality. It is necessary to activate processes of introduction and optimization of external assessment and internal control of quality.

Creation of single system of quality assessment will encourage development of education as an integrated and competitive system based on international quality standards, indicators, and criteria (Kazakhstan National Report on Higher Education, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

Education is the most important element of human capital development for every country in the world. As for higher education, it has become an integral part of the certified characteristics of the society, which produces direct and indirect effects on the economic position of the individual, his/her promotion, and movement along the social ladder (Konstantinovskii and Cherednichenko, 2003).

The growing social significance of education gives the person the opportunity to be either of great benefit to the society - if properly managed or otherwise, of great harm. In this respect it should be noted that the future socio-economic well-being

of the country, moral, and spiritual development of people, improvements to legal institutions, capabilities of the population, exercise of rights and opportunities for both sexes to a great extent depend on the development of the system of education. Training and technical education should be based on professional standards and tightly interconnected with the needs of the economy and the quality of higher education will meet the highest international standards (Address of the President of Kazakhstan, 2011).

Universities of the country should implement effective strategies to enter in the ratings of the leading international universities. The National innovation system should have yielded by 2020 the results in the form of development, patents, and prepared technologies introduced in the country. A special priority in education sphere will be given to national projects such as a unique institution “New International University”, “Special Fund”, and “Intellectual Schools”, which are already working successfully (Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2011).

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