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**REVIEW OF THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM  
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**Abstract.** Since independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the transition to a democratic society and market economy, significant progress has been made in the higher education system of the country. This paper analyzes a number of researches of foreign and domestic scientists on Kazakhstan system of education, compares and contrasts it with the Soviet system and within the post-Soviet countries. The article was prepared within the framework of project AR08052656 «Readiness assessment of Kazakhstani higher educational institutions for transformation within the context of «Triple Helix»», funded by the MES of RK.

**Keywords:** higher education system; Kazakhstan; university; reforms; Soviet system of education.

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**Introduction**

Historically, such issues as trade, health, agriculture and science have been the central part of international discussions, while education has been considered as a domestic issue and was not exposed at the international level. This trend is changing, though. The world community is focusing its attention more and more on education and educational reforms in different countries. Therefore, educational system reforms and dynamics in post-Soviet countries, including Kazakhstan, concern a number of Kazakhstani and foreign researchers as well, whose research was used as a basis for this review. The *purpose* of this paper was to overview research of foreign and domestic scientists on the educational system of Kazakhstan, to compare it with the Soviet system and to analyze its current state.

**Education during the Soviet System  
(1922–1991)**

During the Soviet era educational policy in Kazakhstan had two main goals: to introduce universal primary education and to eradicate adult illiteracy. The author of “The Kazakhs” states that education was the key-stone of the Soviet social control, because universal literacy would open direct communication between the public and the elite; this

would permit the Soviet authorities to reach the Kazakhs without having intermediaries who could distort their message [9, p. 194].

A special all-union delegation of pedagogues was sent to Kazakhstan to study the situation and to improve it. At that time the establishment of the higher educational system of Kazakhstan – the Kazakh State University (today’s Al-Farabi Kazakh National University) was opened. Following this, “a Kazakh branch of the Science Academy was opened in 1938. In 1939–1940 there were 2,672 students enrolled in the higher educational institutions, 1,025 of them were Kazakhs” [9, p. 195].

The educational system under the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was universal, state financed, equal and affordable. But some researchers condemn its strict, centralized control. For instance, Anisimov in his article “The Soviet System of Education” shared his experiences of teaching at a secondary school in the Soviet Union and as a lecturer at an institute of literature [1]. The author struggled with the “political education” and the “Scientific Socialism,” which was inspired by the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.

Professor Heyneman, who has done a tremendous work in studying the educational

system in the former Soviet countries, defines the problems suffered by the system of education because of the central planning. The main problems include: (1) low earnings for education workers, (2) low efficiency of educational institutions, (3) vertical structural rigidity, (4) pedagogical emphasis on “fixed” rather than “dynamic” skills, (5) particularities of selecting for higher education, (6) monopolies in the production of educational materials, and last (7) the absence of openly available education statistics [4, p. 4].

Heyneman asserts that educational institutions are efficient when resources are allocated to the teaching programs that bring high benefit so that the teaching and learning process is quick. The resources allocation decision was based on its political importance rather than on the nature of the product or on the production efficiency. Another indicator of the inefficiency problem is the ratio of staff to students. A high number of staff per student implies that too many resources are spent on salaries, but not on investments, such as computers, libraries, and laboratory facilities.

The other problem was the structure of professional training, which was vertical not horizontal, as Heyneman claims. Vertical organization has induced the curricula stagnation, and halted innovation. Moreover, the size of educational programs was determined by the same parts of the public sector that controlled the economy. For example, Ministries of agriculture controlled state agricultural universities; state transport and power ministries controlled the state-sponsored training in transport and power [4, p. 7]. Educational programs controlling led to the division between research and teaching, overspecialization of programs, and separation of schools and universities by sector. Consequently, public higher education has not been able to respond effectively to the new labor market skill demands. As a result, enrollments and admission to public higher education has declined. The most significant declines were observed in such sciences as en-

gineering, agriculture, transport, and food processing.

Although the Soviet system was universal, equal, and affordable, it was not viable. The system used to prepare well educated competitive specialists, who met the demands and requirements of the twentieth century. That is why all of the post-Soviet countries, after gaining the independence, changed their directions and started reforms in all spheres, including the higher education. The research and studies about post-Soviet countries’ accomplishments are presented in the following section.

### **Comparative studies of the educational systems in post-Soviet countries**

As mentioned earlier, professor of international educational policy, Dr. Stephen Heyneman researched education in different countries of the world. He served the World Bank for 22 years and was even responsible for education policy in 27 European countries, the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia. In one of his works, Heyneman had drawn parallels between the educational systems in the former Soviet Union and Central and Eastern European countries [5]. He tries to identify the importance of education, and the impact of the transition from Party/State to open democracy on it. He identified the main characteristics of the Soviet education, as mentioned in his previous works, summarized changes which have occurred during the transition, and suggested some steps that might be taken towards transition. Finally, he described the influence of the transition on comparative education.

Newell and Reilly have done cross-country comparative research on rates of return to educational qualifications in the transitional economies of Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet countries in Central Asia and Russia [8]. The authors aimed, first of all, to provide compatible estimates of the private rate of return to higher educational qualifications across different countries and through time. In addition, they investi-

gated the impact of changes in the return to higher education on wage.

Likewise, Pomfret analyzed economic experience of five Central Asian countries – Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – since their independence [10]. The author focused on the diversity of policies and types of market economy of the nations, and related those variations to their economic performance and prospects. While tackling their economic performance, he talked about its impact on the educational systems of newly independent states. He compared literacy level of citizens across those nations.

Chapman et al. studied national strategies to improve educational quality in five Central Asian countries as well [3]. Their cross-national comparative study sponsored by the Asian Development Bank, presents a comparative analysis of education reforms and strategies to increase educational quality across these republics. Data for this study came from the *Managing Educational Reform in Countries in Transition* project of the Asian Development Bank conducted during 2001–2002.

Education reforms in each of the countries since their independence were designed through (a) content analysis of government documents, newspaper articles and donor reports, (b) interviews with key education and government leaders and (c) an examination of statistical data that were obtained from the Ministries, National Statistical Agencies and Donor organizations [3, p. 523].

Likewise, Anderson and Heyneman examined the education system of Central Asian countries, discussed its challenges and evaluated the efficiency of education delivery in the market economy. They classified challenges in higher education into four major categories: *structural changes, governance, the nature of what was taught and finance, property and taxation* [7]. Their research is based on survey data, primarily from the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Kazakhstan, on enrollment, completion and ex-

penditures. The researchers conclude the work with a summary of the economic and policy lessons derived from the educational transition.

The issue of education in different countries and regions concern World Bank employees as well. Vandycke conducted a research concerning access to education for the poor in Europe and Central Asia. The author identified the following problems:

- the education system as a whole did not work well, and hence failed to meet adequately poor's needs;
- the private cost of education was too high, so that 'education', as a commodity, competes with other consumption goods in shrinking household budgets;
- the perceived benefits of education (in terms of higher wage earnings) were still low, thereby undermining long-term incentives to invest in education [12, pp. 3–5].

Moreover, Professor Heyneman identified the Soviet system's inflexibility and its inability to adapt to technical changes as the main weakness [5, p. 6]. Although all the weaknesses were widely acknowledged by local reformers in the 1980s, systematic change was left for the transition of the 1990s, which overlapped with the collapse of the USSR and occurrence of the newly independent states (NIS). The further reforms and dynamics in the Kazakhstani educational system, as in the independent state, are considered in the following section.

#### **Kazakhstani system of education (since 1991 to date)**

Buyers, in her study on the Republic of Kazakhstan, stated that the educational situation since independence was somewhat difficult to judge because of incomplete information. The republic has attempted to overhaul both the structure of its education system and much of its substance, but the questions of what should be taught and in what manner continue to loom large [2, p. 55]. The author pointed out that the Constitution of 1995 specifies that education through sec-

ondary school was mandatory and free, and that citizens had the further right to complete education in the republic's higher institutions for free. The issue that remained unsolved was about the language of instructions, because of almost equal distribution of Kazakhs and Russians [2, p. 56].

In the research conducted with DeYoung, professor Heyneman studied the challenges faced by the entire system of education in Kazakhstan, focusing on three higher educational institutions. Those institutions were Kazakh National Technical University after K. Satpayev, Eastern Kazakhstan State University, and Kainar University [6]. Those universities were chosen purposefully, in order to represent national leading, state, and private universities. Units of analysis were recruitment, admissions and financial aid, retention of enrolled students, faculty employment and salaries, investment and fund raising, and so forth. Based on the data collected and findings, they made policy recommendations for institutions individually as well as for the higher educational system in general.

Professor Heyneman was also involved in the "Post-Graduate Training and Research in Higher Education Management in Kazakhstan" project, which was supported by the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs of the US government [7]. Within the frames of the project, he helped to determine some issues needed to be addressed for successful higher education transition. The project consisted of four components:

- Sponsoring young scholars coming to the US to participate in graduate seminars on higher education problems; they visited a number of higher educational institutions and did an internship with tertiary education organizations.
- Rectors' intensive visits to the American universities, meetings with senior officials, discussions of higher educational problems and policies and observing the work of the university administration.
- American professors' visits to Kazakhstani universities.

- Transformation and application of American syllabi and curriculum resources (reading materials) to the Kazakhstani system of education [7, p. 3].

Professor Heyneman asserts that the project was successful because of the emphasis on efficiency and the effort to transfer credits from one university to another. On the other hand, the project faced problems such as the lack of an expert body and structural and organizational handicaps in new fields of study for Kazakhstani universities. Based on these lessons, Heyneman encourages Kazakhstani universities to participate in international research programs sponsored by UNESCO, USAID, the EU, World Bank and others.

On the other hand, Imangaliyeva stressed that Kazakhstan faced a problem regarding the quality and access to education. There was a difference in the quality of education between urban and rural areas [11]. The report concluded that the national policy on education did not account for the interests of students, their parents and employers, claiming civil society had been virtually excluded from managing and controlling the quality of education. Creating an effective educational system was only possible through a joint effort of the state, business and civil society. Such cooperation should ensure transparency and accountability of the system, prevent corruption and increase efficiency.

As professor Zhakenov asserts, development of higher professional education provides a solution of society development and is conditioned by the following social and economy regularities:

- transition to market economy that includes alteration of productive forces and relations of production as well as social status of production objects;
- fast change of technologies resulted in production facility outdated and identified insufficient level of specialists' qualification;
- integrative character of scientific research conducted at junction of various sciences and synthesis of discipline knowledge areas;

- intensive usage of up-to-date information and communication technologies as means of intellectual activity providing automation of physical and mental work [13].

The world experience shows that the best education systems in the world are decentralized and prepare students, not only for a job, but also for the world-citizenship by giving them a broad-range of skills and knowledge. In recent years Kazakhstan has made great efforts in reforming the educational system of the nation.

### **Conclusion**

One of the major results of the reforms is the creation of a network of higher education institutions offering a flexible response to the educational needs of the population and making higher education viable and internally sustainable. The conceptual model for the national higher education system was developed, and the legal frameworks for both public and private education institutions were made the same. The education system was reorganized in accordance with the current economic conditions, and Kazakhstan has adopted some principles of the Bologna process by implementing the credit system.

Kazakhstan's participation in the Bologna process should be considered as a unique chance to learn about the best practices of other countries' higher education. The country benefits a lot from high international mobility of students and professors, who, with the help of their international experience, are able to contribute to country's competitiveness.

The purpose of the higher educational reforms was to prepare globally minded, locally responsible, and internationally competitive students. Therefore, academic staff of higher educational institutions should be trained in compliance with the world standards, in order to integrate international elements into their curricula.

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