

# Tendencies and problems of the higher education system in Kazakhstan

## 1. Introduction

The role of higher education in the world gradually evolves. Today the world community places the big hopes in universities, demanding from them performance of a wide spectrum of the task promoting growth of economy and formation of a knowledge society. The higher school gradually turns into the full member of market relations. It stimulates active transformation of its administrative structure, changing of functions, searching of new sources of financing, searching of new methods of training and the control of knowledge.

## 2. Tendencies of the Higher Education in Kazakhstan

The Higher Education in Kazakhstan still has a background of the Soviet Union system. Since independence in 1991, Kazakhstan began to reform its education system in order to meet the needs of the market economy. The private business often developed by trial and error method, because not many people had the scientific knowledge about doing business, the system of higher education adapted very slowly to the new conditions, and did not have time for business development. The education system, as well as the entire economy was in crisis. All educational programs and teaching methods were outdated and disagreed with the new conditions of the free market. That was the moment when the connection between the higher education institutions and the labor market were lost.

In Kazakhstan the reform concept of higher education has been developed during the period (the end of 90th) when a considerable part of the government consisted of the „young reformers”. Its major features were: the western standards orientation; formation of the market of educational services; transition to financing not objects, but entities of educational process; counteraction to the corruption mechanism in higher school system.

During the nineties, when the financing of high schools constantly decreased, the reforms, were carried out by the government in the higher education, actually represented the structural transformations directed on expenses reduction. Between 1990 and

1996 the government expenses for the higher school were reduced about 7% of GDP to 3,3%. Between 1998 and 2001 the volume of the means spent for higher education, has decreased even more considerably: from 6,3% to 1,2% of GDP. For truth's sake it is necessary to notice, that in the beginning of the new millennium the situation with financing of higher schools has essentially improved: in 2008 expenses for education have grown more than in 2,8 times in comparison with 2004, and their share in gross domestic product has made 3,7 %<sup>1</sup>. In 2013 the government expenses for the higher education are 5,2 mln. euro or 4,2% of GDP<sup>2</sup>.

On the other hand, the desire to fit in with the international standards of education dictated to the Kazakhstan government advancement towards some the educational innovations as quick as possible. For example, replacement the entrance examinations to university by the computer unified nation testing exercised by the National center of government standards and testing. The unified requirements for all participants within the test tasks on a standard set of subjects have been established and the bottom threshold of result – 70 (for entrance to government universities) and 50 (to private) out 125 questions within 5 subjects is defined. The main achievement of this model became, according to experts, sharp decrease of the corruption level in the higher school, because the universities have been actually discharged of procedure of entrance selection.

In a case with implementation of the unified nation testing we see, that the hard line of the government bodies of Kazakhstan has rather easily overcome resistance of opposition to test system. Meanwhile, one more major problem connected with test system as an estimation of knowledge quality is a question of task quality. However in Kazakhstan this polemic has not received support in the mass-media. Separate remarks to tests concern basically with impossibility to reveal creative abilities of the entrant.

The main target of students is to get a degree, in other words, to get a piece of paper that confirms their knowledge. It happens that such document is not important for a job. Graduates get a job somewhere, and already there get the necessary knowledge and experience. Unfortunately, this lack between education degree and real practice makes the usefulness of studying in the university for student very low. All what the student receives from such training is a formal diploma and the opportunity to find a more prestigious job.

On account of the globalisation, the education systems of the majority of the developed countries are in continuous modernisation and reforming. Kazakhstan is in the front lines by the pace of introduction of innovations in the education sphere. This process goes

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<sup>1</sup> Vystuplenie ministra obrazovaniya M.Zh.Zhurinova ot 3 oktyabrya 1995 goda. Vestnik vysshej shkoly Kazakhstana. 1995. #6. S.4.

<sup>2</sup> Vystuplenie ministra obrazovaniya i nauki RK B. Zhumagulova – <http://primeminister.kz/news/show/22/v-kazahstane-gosrashody-na-obrazovanie-dostigli-13-trln-tenge-ili-42-ot-godovogo-vvp-/28-01-2013> (access 31.05.2014).

continuously and is accelerated every year – in the country the lofty aims of quality improvement are laid down.

Recently, new educational development program for the years of 2011-2020<sup>3</sup> was introduced to further reform the education system in order to meet the needs of the growing economy and European standards in education. There are the primary goals of education system development in the Government program.

The Government of Kazakhstan has already made a lot for occurrence in the international educational space. First of all it is the transition to the three-stage system (the bachelor, the master, and the doctor) and the signing of the Bologna declaration in 2010 (11th May 2010)<sup>4</sup>. In 2011 in Kazakhstan the new classification of institution of higher education has been developed and introduced. Taking into account of world experience the new requirements for categories of institution of higher education have been developed: national research universities, national high schools, research universities, academies and institutes. According to the aims of the government program the new classification of institution of higher education and also adaptation of management mechanisms, such as a rating of institution of higher education, must increase of their quality.

Within the Strategic plan of higher education development, the government has started to implement a long-term Government program of the education development 2011-2020. One of the main tasks is the further development of three-level system of degrees. Both state and private universities prepare bachelors and masters. While only two state universities have the licences for preparation of doctors (PhD). Within this process they have signed agreements with many foreign universities. These agreements have strengthened quality of preparation PhD that gave the possibility, under the aegis of the Ministry of science and education to send doctoral candidate abroad. The other aim of the Program is inviting the foreigner professors to Kazakhstan. That gave a possibility involve the bigger amount of students. In 2011 for lecturing in 27 universities of Kazakhstan have been invited 1100 foreign scientists and teachers.

### **3. Internationalization of the Higher Education in Kazakhstan**

Internationalisation of the Kazakhstan higher education is marked by significant development – Kazakhstan has joined Bologna process and become its 47th participant. Joining process was preceded by the preparation during eight years, and for today according to some indicators, for example, introduction of PhD degree as third level of higher

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<sup>3</sup> Gosudarstvennaya programma razvitiya obrazovaniya Respubliki Kazakhstan na 2011-2010 gody, № 1118 ot 7.12.2010 – <http://ru.government.kz/resources/docs/doc18> (access 31.05.2014).

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan – [http://www.edu.gov.kz/en/yzmeti/bolon\\_procesi/](http://www.edu.gov.kz/en/yzmeti/bolon_procesi/) (access 31.05.2014).

education, Kazakhstan outstripped some countries of Europe, including the Russian Federation<sup>5</sup>.

According to the Human Development Index (HDI), annually published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in 2013 Kazakhstan was included into group of the countries with a high level of development of human potential and has occupied 69 place (in 2012 – 51, in 2011 – 72) from 187 countries all over the World. The important factor of the international integration of higher education is the participation of the Kazakhstan universities in the European Union programs TEMPUS and Erasmus Mundus. As a result of the cooperation the wide range of teachers and students has got an access to the European education and culture.

One more project of the education internationalisation is the cooperation of member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). The project is directed on the development of the integration processes of education, science and technologies spheres subject to the best national traditions, the development experience of national educational systems, and also based on the studying of approaches and the principles of the world practice; includes founding the SCO University, the academic exchange, creation of a network of language and regional geographic courses etc.

The essential role in the Kazakhstan practice is played also by other international mechanisms of the internationalisation management. Among them activity of the American Council for the international education of United States Department of State, the program of academic exchanges DAAD, programs of the British Council, etc.

In spite of fact that Kazakhstan has a high position in the different ratings, there are still many problems to increase the educational quality in universities. A small number of students and teacher make up their mind to study abroad. Human resources play huge role in the economic development. This simple wisdom for the economic changes and technological breakthroughs becomes even more urgent. The success in the development of Kazakhstan economy will depend of the effectiveness of the work of this system.

The correct development of the education system is also particularly relevant because of the fact that the dynamics and principles of the world economy are determined by the most developed countries (USA, Japan, European Union countries, etc.). The more country is developed, and the more developed technologies it has, the higher economic efficiency of their companies and the higher profit they receive. If our specialists will not be able to work with modern technologies (either technology in the service sector or in industry), will not understand the principles and laws of development of the

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<sup>5</sup> V.M. Fillipov, *Chetyre stupeni internaolizacii: upravlenie processami internaolizacii vysshego obrazovaniya na globalnom, regionalnom, nacionalnom i institucionalnom urovnyah* // Vysheje obrazovanie segodnia. N 6 2010, Moskva, s. 4-8.

markets, then the Kazakhstan companies will not be able to achieve efficiency in many vital sectors. With such a pessimistic scenario, the development of Kazakhstan is only possible with the ever-increasing volumes of production of «easy profitable» industries (production of energy resources, metals, etc.). In such circumstances, any country is becoming heavily dependent on the world markets of raw materials. And escape from dependency and addiction to cheap money and easy money is very difficult.

#### **4. Restricted Autonomy of the Higher School**

**Management autonomy.** According to Kazakhstan legislation in the field of higher education, direct management of a higher educational institution is carried out by its head appointed by the founder of higher school if other is not provided by the legislation. At inadequate implementation of the duties by the head of higher school, the contract can be canceled by the founder unilaterally ahead of schedule.

Thus, in Kazakhstan the heads of the government higher schools, except for national higher schools which are appointed by the Decree of President RK, are appointed by the Minister of Education and Science<sup>6</sup>.

**Financial autonomy.** The assessment of payment for training. From the point of view of a financial autonomy the possibility of the independent command finance formed at the expense of education payment by students, is one of significant financial possibilities of higher school. In the world practice, the most widespread is the way when the size of the education payment and other administrative gathering, are assessment by in common branch ministry and university. The education cost for country citizens is established or partially regulated by assessment of the maximum value threshold of training, and education cost for foreign students determined by higher school independently. Moreover, as a rule, the education cost for a foreign student exceeds education cost for the domestic student.

The question of training payment in higher schools of Kazakhstan is regulated by the government<sup>7</sup>. According to the state educational standard, the government universities define the training payment within the specialties and training forms in coordination with the authorized body in a sphere of education. University concludes a contract with trained, developed on the basis of the typical contract on rendering of educational services. Meanwhile, the full education cost in the higher schools of Kazakhstan, irrespective

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<sup>6</sup> Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan ot 21 aprelya 2008 goda №573 “O voprosah gosudarstvennyh vysschih uchebnyh zavedeniyah”.

<sup>7</sup> Gosudarstvennyj obsheobyazatelnyj standart obrazovaniya RK 5.03.008-2009 «Sistema obrazovaniya Respubliki Kazakhstan. Kontingent uchashihsya. Osnovnye polozeniya» (utverzhen prikazom Ministerstva obrazovaniya i nauki RK ot 20 iulya 2009 goda № 347) (punkty 5.4-5.5).

of an ownership pattern, cannot be less than the size of the educational grant. Moreover, according to item 8 of article 62 of the Law “On Education”<sup>8</sup> the expenses of the educational institutions, which realizing the professional curriculums of higher education, for one trained on a paid basis cannot be less than size of the educational grant.

**Key changes in the financing.** Significant differences in the approaches to the management of higher education in Kazakhstan also apply to the system of financing universities. In Kazakhstan a fundamentally different way of development has been chosen - some universities were corporatized. By 2001 nine major universities in Kazakhstan had become joint-stock companies (to date 17 universities are joint-stock companies<sup>9</sup>), 20% of the shares of which had been distributed among the staffs, and 80% had been remained in the state hands for the subsequent selling. Thus privatization of higher education system began, and the main emphasis was made on the fact that public universities are non-core and unprofitable assets for the state, poorly oriented to the needs of the labor market. According to the thought of the authors of the reform, exactly the active players of the labor market – potential employers – had to get control over universities and use them to train their personnel reserve.

In most cases the corporatization of universities and coming of private investors had very tangible negative consequences. Kazakhstan authorities considered the corporatization as an opportunity to reduce the costs of maintaining universities, which often led to a decrease in quality of students training.

The major problem with the corporatization of universities became not only openly mercantile intentions of the government, but also the question of the development of an effective educational institutions management tool in the new conditions. Every corporation aims to maximize profits for their shareholders. As a result of corporatization many employees of universities just lost their jobs. Those of them who stayed in their places and even are minority shareholders of JSC-universities lack of real opportunities to influence the policy of the management.

The process of corporatization of universities is considered as an additional opportunity to raise the necessary funds for the maintenance of educational institutions. However, the universities’ revenues also consist of funds from commercial training. This is one of the most closed from the general public theme in Kazakhstan. It is known that the cost of education in most prestigious universities of the republic is 2-3 thousand US dollars a year. In the “second level” universities this value is somewhat smaller. A specific

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<sup>8</sup> Закон Республики Казахстан „Об Образовании” от 2007 года с изменениями и дополнениями от 24 октябрья 2011 года.

<sup>9</sup> Ассоциация высших учебных заведений Казахстана – [http://edurk.kz/ru/349-spisok\\_vuzov\\_kazakhstan.html](http://edurk.kz/ru/349-spisok_vuzov_kazakhstan.html) (access 31.05.2014).

value is influenced by many factors such as the particular specialization, availability of the military department at the university, etc.

**Academic autonomy.** Citizens of Kazakhstan, foreign citizens and stateless persons having secondary general (general secondary), initial vocational (technical and vocational), secondary vocational (post-secondary) and higher education are accepted in universities of Kazakhstan. However, pursuant to paragraph 3 of the Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated May 30, 2011 № 222 “On approval of the Standard rules of acceptance to the training in the educational organizations implementing professional training programs of higher education”, an acceptance to universities is performed on a competitive basis in accordance with points of certificate issued by the results of the universal national test (UNT) or complex testing performed by the National Testing Center of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This requirement standardizes the process of acceptance of students to universities, thereby restricting academic autonomy of universities to determine the criteria and process of acceptance of students to the training. The Government Decision of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated January 19, 2012 № 130 “Standard rules of acceptance to the training in the educational organizations implementing professional training programs of technical and vocational education” regulates the timing of receiving the documents and their consideration by acceptance committees.

Thus, in Kazakhstan the state strictly regulates the rules of acceptance of students in undergraduate and graduate programs. Such situation is typical for a small number of European countries, namely Austria, Denmark, France, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, and Switzerland. As for the number of students, the state determines the number of students whose education is carried out at the expense of the state education grant, but in determining the number of students on a paid basis the universities are virtually autonomous, except for the necessity of following the general rules of acceptance of students (UNT scores not less than 50). This situation is typical for a number of European countries, such as Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia. The Kazakhstan system feature is the presence of quotas for education of the vulnerable segment of the population.

According to paragraph 1 of the article 39 of the Law “On Education”<sup>10</sup> (hereinafter – the Law), Kazakhstan universities are authorized to issue the diplomas of the state or their own form. For awarding the state diplomas university must have a license for educational activity and a certificate of state attestation. The state attestation is a procedure that is carried out for monitoring the compliance of educational services provided by educational organizations with the requirements of the state educational standard. According

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<sup>10</sup> Zakon Respubliki Kazakhstan „Ob Obrazovanii” ot 2007 goda s izmeneniyami i dopolneniyami ot 24 oktyabrya 2011 goda.

to paragraph 4 of the article 59 of the Law, the educational organization, which has past the institutional and specialized accreditation in accreditation bodies are exempt from state attestation procedures for accredited educational programs (specialties) for a term of accreditation.

In accordance with paragraph 9 of the article 5 of the Law, the authority in the field of education holds state attestation of universities regardless of type of ownership and departmental affiliation (except for medical and pharmaceutical education). State attestation is carried out every five years in educational organizations (institutional) and by specialties (specialized). According to paragraph 1 of the article 39 of the Law, diplomas of autonomous educational organizations are equated to the documents on the education of the state form.

However, in accordance with paragraph 1-1 of the article 39 of the Law, the educational organizations having a special status may issue the documents on the education of their own form. The special status of the educational organization provides universities abilities to determine independently the order of acceptance on education, develop educational curricula, to use their own rules and regulations in the field of educational, scientific and methodological activities, as well as to the documents on the education of their own form. In turn, according to the Law “On Education”, the special status is granted to the national higher schools [§ 56-1, art. 1] and national research universities [§ 56-2, art. 1].

## **5. Conclusions**

The reforming of higher education in Kazakhstan is performed in a more firm way based on the needs of the state to “optimize” the sphere of education, primarily in terms of costs of its maintenance. In Kazakhstan one of the components of higher education system reform is the desire to reduce the state cost of maintenance of universities, activate self-financing mechanisms, and provide indirect financial assistance to the most capable enrollee. Thus, the main efforts of the state are transferred from resolving the current problems of maintaining material and technical base of universities to creation of the scheme of individual financing of education of specific students.

In spite of the government aims to disclaim responsibility of the financial support of the higher education system, it reserves the right of control the whole system mostly on the all direction. To date the universities are between at least two realities – practice (constantly changing the market order) and government and international standards. The government still tries to play the main role for education system development. It predicts to be a market when it decides how many grants give and for which specialties, how

much training costs etc. From the other hand it strictly controls if the universities answer to the government and international standards.

The most difficult questions of the internationalization and globalization of education system is how to adapt the new methods and approach in the reality. Kazakhstan as one of the Post-Soviet state has both the heritage of Soviet education system and their selves' national traditions. There is the strong institute of the family which play the principal role in the negotiation in the country.

The new system knowledge evaluation is not well-defined. In many respects it operates incorrectly, ambiguously and biasedly. The leap of the higher education system in Kazakhstan has led to the deterioration educational level.

Within the transformation of the education system just external components – credits, multilevel system of training – have been adapted. Internal components of Bologna system – the academic mobility of students and teachers – do not work.

The other problem is insufficient level of possession of English among students and teachers. The government tries to improve these indicators because of increasing the role of an international activity (the international conferences, publications in leading world magazines etc.).

