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# **Kazakhstani School Education Development from the 1930s: History and Current Trends**

*Aigerim Mynbayeva\* and Victoria Pogolian\*\**

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*Abstract:* This article analyzes the development of school education in Kazakhstan focusing on its two periods - the Soviet period (when Kazakhstan was a part of the USSR) and the post-Soviet period that started after the fall of the Soviet Union. The analysis includes the main goals, features, strengths and weaknesses of school education of each period. The stages of the development of school education within each period are described on the basis of legislation development focusing on the economic political and demographic contexts as the driving forces of the education reforms.

*Keywords:* History of education, secondary education, the Soviet school education, education reform

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## Introduction

At present Kazakhstan has high indicators of educational development: according to UNESCO, Kazakhstan ranks among 26 states with the literacy level of adult education amounting to 97% (Unesco, 2007), its level of primary education ranks 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> place in the world (Unesco, 2007), and *Newsweek Daily of World's Best Countries* of 2010 rated Kazakhstani education level as 14 (Interactive Infographic of the World's Best Countries, 2010). These achievements resulted from reforms of the system of education, which took place during the last decades. The dynamics of the changes and their significance are obvious when compared with the state of education in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: in 1916 literacy level was about 2%, with only 4% of native Kazakh population being literate, and the literacy level amongst the native Russian population being 9% (Khrapchenkov & Khrapchenkov, 1998, p. 101). The aim of this research is to identify the main features of the development of school education in Kazakhstan starting with 1930s, the basic features and driving forces of the transformations, their goals, strengths, weaknesses and problems.

## Theoretical Framework

The research has been based on historiographic, systemic and mixed approaches which have been applied complementarily. The study derives its framework from Cambi's (2003) concept of the transition from the closed method of constructing education history to the open method, the one enriched by different sciences of the education research area and a variety of methods and tools. As Cambi (2003) contends, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a historiographic revolution took place which transformed the theory and the tools of research. A closed method of constructing history of education was replaced by an open method, the one enriched with various branches of science, and a variety of methods and tools enabling researchers to represent history more precisely. Cambi (2003) describes three revolutions in historiography of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these being the revolutions of:

- methods which brought about liberalization of methods and their plurality;
- the time which brought about a plural and dialectic view of historic time;

- documents which broadened the interpretation of the very term ‘document’ and brought about a range of sources and their new perception.
- These three revolutions constructed a critical image of history with pluralism of approaches and complexity of views on history. In the framework of this approach, the sources of this research included:
  - research publications dealing with history of pedagogy and education written by Kazakhstani and foreign scholars;
  - laws, legal acts, concepts and programmes of the government;
  - publications and reports with statistical data, national reports on Kazakhstani education;
  - official web-sites including the web-site of President of Kazakhstan, of Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan.

These sources have been analyzed in order to address the following research questions: What are the main features and stages of the development of school education in Kazakhstan starting with 1930s?; What are the driving forces of school education reforms in Kazakhstan within the period starting with 1930s, their goals, strengths, weaknesses and problems? Addressing these research questions, we analyzed the sources taking into consideration the context of the political, economic and social situation of each period of the development of school education.

### **Historic Background**

The data preserved from the Middle Ages give evidence that there was a developed system of childhood education in the villages and madrassas in the territories where modern Kazakhstan evolved (Mashanov, 1970). The most famous of the madrassas was located in Otrar, where the renowned philosopher of the East, Abu Nasir al-Farabi (ca. 870-950) studied. His teacher was Abu Malik, the famous scientist in the steppe. In the city of Otrar in the Kazakh land, the second largest library in the world was located (Mashanov, 1970).

Between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the territory of Kazakhstan was annexed to form part of the Russian Empire, and that was the time when the development of the state system of primary education started (Tazhibayev, 1958). In the Russian Empire the Kazakhstani territories were governed by three provinces – Orenburg, West Siberia and Turkmenistan. According to the Tazhibayev (1958), both Kazakh nobility and common people indulged

in education with passion, the thirst for knowledge was integrated into the nomadic lifestyle of the Kazakh people. Kazakh tribes and villagers contributed huge sums of money not only to the treasury of the Russian Empire but also for the foundation of primary schools (Mektebs) in villages. This genetic code of value of knowledge is expressed in the folk saying: “The Kazakh will sell the last sheep to send the son to school”.

Notwithstanding this strive for knowledge and learning, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the data of 1916 indicate, literacy level in Kazakh territories was about 2%, with only 4% of native Kazakh population being literate, the literacy level amongst the native Russian population being 9% (Khrapchenkov & Khrapchenkov, 1998, p. 101).

With the establishment of the Soviet Power, in 1920, Kazakhstan became a part of Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR) named Kirgiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, since 1925 it was named Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, and in 1936 it changed its status and became one of the Soviet Union Republics - Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (Kazakh SSR).

### **School Education Development in Kazakhstan during the Soviet Period**

The Soviet period of the development of education strengthened the tradition for Kazakhstani peoples' value of knowledge and education. During this period, an extensive system of education encompassing pre-school, primary and secondary schools was constructed, and the higher education system was first established in Kazakhstan (Khrapchenkov & Khrapchenkov, 1998). During this period the education policy in Kazakhstan was determined centrally, from Moscow, the capital of the USSR. The authorities in Kazakhstan mainly duplicated documents of the Soviet government and the Communist Party of the USSR (Khrapchenkov & Khrapchenkov, 1998). Like in every Soviet republic, all educational institutions were state owned and controlled and offered education free of charge (Pogosian, 2012, p. 302).

#### *Periodization of the development of education during the Soviet period*

It is noteworthy that the analysis of research of the history of the development of education during the Soviet period reveals differences in approaches between Russian and Kazakh historical and pedagogical

traditions. In Russian publications this history usually starts with 1917, the year of Bolshevik Revolution (see for example, Starikova 2008, pp. 211-227) identifies the following stages of education development in Kazakhstan: 1917-1930, 1931-1945, 1946-1985, 1986-1991). Kazakhstani scholars regard 1920s as the starting stage of education development during the Soviet period, the time when Kazakhstan officially became a part of the Soviet Union (Sembaev, 1957; Khrapchenkov & Khrapchenkov, 1998; Igibayeva, 2007).

Arguably, the development of education during the Soviet time was primarily influenced by the Soviet educational policy, in this research we follow the approach put forward by R. Nurtazina (Nurtazina, 2005), a historian and a politologist, who identified the following stages of the development of educational policy of Kazakhstan based on the political priorities of the USSR:

1918-1930 – the development of the structure of authorities and the basic functions of educational policy: liquidation of illiteracy and inclusion of the population into the political process, clarification of the ideas of current reforms;

1931-1960 – the educational policy develops in the context of commanding administrative system of management prevailing in the USSR and in the context of forced collectivization of the economy. The general primary education is implemented in Kazakhstan, education being provided in the languages of all the ethnic nationalities residing in the territory of Kazakhstan. At the same time, indigenous traditions of raising children and of pedagogy become no longer relevant in education.

1961-1990s – the epoch of technical revolution, of intensification of research and explorations.

These basic stages of educational policy development underlie the studies which highlight the history of the development of school education (Sembaev, 1957; Khrapchenkov & Khrapchenkov, 1998; Igibayeva, 2007).

Before 1930s, the educational policies of the USSR and Kazakhstan had been fairly liberal, as that was the time of educators searching for constructing the system of public education. In Kazakhstan, the Party “Alash” suggested its model of a national (Kazakh) public school. The leaders of Kazakhstani intelligentsia representing “Alash” developed the programme and the textbooks for schools and for training teachers. We start the analysis of the changes of Kazakhstani school education development within the Soviet period with stage 2, with 1930s, the years which are considered to be crucial for Kazakhstani education with a tough

educational policy “from above”, with the unification of primary school types and general uniformity of education on the whole territory of the USSR.

### **Development of Kazakhstani secondary education from 1930 till 1960**

Although, as mentioned above, the period of 1930-1960 is regarded by scholars as a single stage of the development of Kazakhstani school education, each of the three decades are very specific in terms of the economic, political and demographic situation, and it is worthwhile to highlight these decades in detail.

#### *1930s*

Historically, the 1930s were tragic for Kazakhstan due to the policy of collectivization which had very negative consequences, with a wave of famine that reduced by half the native population. In 1932-1933:

over 50 thousand Kazakh children lost their parents. The famine in Kazakhstan significantly decreased the number of schoolchildren in Kazakh primary schools. [...] in 1932-1933 one million 750 thousand people became direct victims of the famine and the associated diseases, that is 42% of the Kazakh population of Kazakhstan, many of them being children (Igbayeva, 2004, p. 45).

In addition, farmers’ rebellions swept across Kazakhstan and resulted in mass repressions. For Kazakhstan, the 1930s were in general the years of mass repressions, and it was in 1930s that many prominent figures and organizers of Kazakhstani education were executed

In the early 1930s a number of Acts concerning schools were adopted in the USSR by the Central Committee of Communist Party, such as “On primary and secondary education” (25.08.1931), “On primary and secondary schools curricula and mode of instruction” (8.25 .1932), “On the USSR primary and secondary schools’ structure” (03.15.1934), “On the primary and secondary schools’ textbooks” (07.08.1935) (Public Education in the USSR, 1974). For many decades these documents determined a unified type of the secondary school with a unified curriculum, with common organizational and pedagogical principles of instruction and

education. The following system of general secondary education was established:

- primary school – 1<sup>st</sup>- 4<sup>th</sup> grades (first 4 years);
- basic secondary school – 1<sup>st</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> grades (first 7 years);
- secondary school – 1<sup>st</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> (first 10 years) (Sembayev, 1958; Ilyasova 1997, p. 27; Khrapchenkov & Khrapchenkov, 1998, p. 108).

In 1930/31 academic year, a four year comprehensive compulsory primary education was introduced. The school was modeled as the pre-revolutionary gymnasium with its strict rules, discipline and regime; the process of instruction was regulated by a rigid schedule and lesson system; school self-governance was replaced with central authorities' control, and classes were to have head-teachers; further, the Pioneer and Komsomol organizations became part and parcel of school education process (Starikova, 2008, p. 220).

In 1937/38 academic year, the education authorities of Kazakhstan set up new curricula for primary and secondary schools. According to these curricula town and rural schools were to teach the following subjects: native language, literature, Russian language, Russian literature, foreign language, arithmetic, algebra, geometry and trigonometry, natural science, history, geography, physics, chemistry, geometry and mineralogy, Constitution, drawing, singing, physical training (Sembayev, 1958, p. 258). In 1938, The Soviet of Public Deputies of the USSR and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan introduced another special Act "On mandatory course of the Russian language in Kazakh schools". As pointed out by Sembayev, this Act established a strict order of teaching Russian in Kazakh, Uzbek, Uyghur, Tartar and other schools, as well as providing writing textbooks and improving methods of teaching and training teachers of the Russian language (Sembayev, 1958, pp. 258-259). That year is described as the beginning of "Russification" of school education in Kazakhstan.

This policy was pursued during the further implementation of the Soviet education, and its consequences still have an impact on the current development of school education in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. It is noteworthy that "Russification" was a common policy of the USSR, but in Kazakhstan it took place in a very specific language and demographic contexts.

The language aspect deals with the changes of the alphabet of the Kazakh language. In 1929, the Kazakh alphabet was changed from Arabic to Latin and afterwards, in 1940, the Cyrillic replaced the Latin alphabet.

These changes had an impact on the accessibility of the previously known works of philosophers, which had been written in Arabic and also of Kazakh literature, which had been written with Latin letters.

The demographic aspect concerns Stalin's policy of resettlement of peoples which caused a flood of deportations in the late 1930s, (Yakovlev, 2005). As a result, in 1939/1940 academic year the number of pupils of the titular nationality was 39%, and there were 54% of Kazakh schools out of the total number of schools Sembayev (1958).

It was also the period when the national (Kazakh) school, the national component in the education content, the use of national languages as languages of instruction, and the development of the national identity came under attack (Khrapchenkov & Khrapchenkov, 1998).

#### *1940s*

During World War II, Kazakhstan accepted the people deported from various parts of the Soviet Union (Yakovlev, 2005), and also those evacuated from the occupied territories. A total of 109 boarding homes for orphans and homeless primary school age children and 40 educational institutions were built to accommodate 19,000 people who were evacuated from elsewhere in the Soviet Union and accommodated in Kazakhstan (Izmailov, 1973, p. 180). However, notwithstanding the evacuation of people to Kazakhstan, the number of pupils in schools decreased, as pupils had to start working. High school pupils left schools and went to vocational colleges and to schools located at plants. Teenagers and young adolescents made 45% of all the working people in Kazakhstan (Kaliev & Imasheva, 2009, p. 215).

During the wartime, the number of school hours for physical training was increased in the school curricula and the studies of the foundations of agriculture were introduced. The education content became more oriented for the development of patriotic feeling of pupils and for the applied aspects of sciences, for the practical links of theory and life. Schools were involved in public life, their pupils working at plants and gathering the crops.

In 1943, Research Institute of Pedagogical Sciences named after Y. Altynsarin was reestablished, and in 1944, the Kazakh State Women Pedagogical Institute was founded and for a long time it was the only institution that trained teachers able to teach in the native language of pupils in rural schools. This Institute developed school curricula for the Kazakh language and literature, published textbooks for implementing

these curricula, translated into Kazakh the school textbooks for other subjects. At the same time, owing to the deportations and evacuations, the number of Kazakh schools dropped from 54% in 1940 to 47% in 1950, and the number of ethnic Kazakh school children during the same period dropped from 39% to 35% (Sembayev, 1958).

In 1946 the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan adopted an Act "Strengthening Kazakh secondary school" which stimulated training staff for Kazakh schools and also led to improving schools' premises. In 1947, the USSR Council of Ministers issued a Decree "On the Development of Higher and Secondary Education in the Kazakh SSR" aiming to enhance the development of secondary and higher education and to improve their funding. As a result of these activities, 187 schools were preserved out of 259 schools, the rest of the schools were transformed to schools offering 7-year school education (Sembayev, 1958, p. 252). In its turn, that ensured the transition to 7 years of mandatory school education.

### *1950s*

The main driving forces of education development in this decade were of various origins, they included the demographic, political, economic and cultural factors. The demographic factor is related with the growth of the population; the political factor is related with the end of Stalin epoch and the change of the authorities of the USSR, and consequently a new vector of the development of the state. The economic factor is rooted in the development of virgin lands and further industrialization and development of collective farms in Kazakhstan, the planned system of the economic development, which also influenced the planned development of education. The cultural factor is related with the world science and technological progress and the rise of science in Kazakhstan, including the development of pedagogical sciences in the USSR and Kazakhstan.

In the 1950s the mass cultivation of virgin and fallow lands began in Kazakhstan which caused merging of collective farms and a flow of new residents: according to expert evaluations, "about one million of new residents came from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus and settled in Kazakhstan, and in 1955, on the new farms of the virgin lands, a total of 146 primary and 109 seven-year secondary schools were set up" (Izmailov, 1973, p. 180).

In 1950s, the demographic situation in Kazakhstan was also influenced by urbanization. In 1939, 28% of the population lived in towns, and 73% lived in rural areas, while in 1959, 44% of people lived in towns, and 56%

lived in rural areas. This trend prevailed in the following years: in 1970, town and rural residents were equal in numbers, and after that there was a continuous growth of urban population (Valentey, 1985). The urbanization created favourable conditions for the introduction of mandatory secondary education, whilst at the same time the mandatory education by itself fostered further urbanization.

In 1953-1954 the political reforms related with the change of the authorities in the USSR gave rise to the gradual changes in the development of education both in the USSR and Kazakhstan. Khrushchev's "Thaw" had a big impact on school education development. In his speech at the XIII Congress of the Komsomol in 1958, he emphasized the positive aspects of the Soviet school and criticized its shortcomings: the fact that instruction was too academic, the fact that the school did not prepare its graduates for working life, the fact that the younger generation was more oriented to continuing education at the universities and colleges (Khrapchenkov & Khrapchenkov, 1998). Khrushchev's criticism was followed by Act "On strengthening the link of the school with life and further development of the system of education in the USSR" (12/24/1958) which led to the changes in school curricula introducing labor education and polytechnical education, school education was combined with industrial practice at plants, all these measures fostering the practical and psychological preparation of students for working life.

By the second half of the 1950s, there were the following significant changes: school education was separated from religious education, and a new type of secondary institution was established – the boarding school; eight-year compulsory secondary education was introduced; and school education was prolonged up to eleven years (Starikova, 2008, p. 224).

### **The development of school education in 1960s- 1990s**

In the 1960s, the main priority of the educational policy of the USSR was the transition to universal secondary education aiming at raising the level of education of manpower in the industry and agriculture, and several Acts were issued for that purpose: "On measures for further improvement of the secondary school" (1966), "On the completion of the transition to universal secondary education and further development of secondary schools" (1972), "On further improvement of instruction and education of students of secondary schools and preparing them for work" (1977)

(Khrapchenkov & Khrapchenkov, 1998, p.113). All these Acts were also adopted in all the Soviet Union republics. Due to the implementation of these acts, by 1976, the transition to the universal secondary education in the USSR had been completed. The content of education was changed to meet the requirements of the actual Soviet and world-wide development of science, and the laboratory equipment and facilities for learning sciences were bought for schools. In 1969, compared with 1967, the number of laboratories for physics increased by 750, the number of laboratories for chemistry increased by 316 (Oku-agartu isi, 1980, p. 397).

In the 1970s, Research Institute for Pedagogical Sciences named after Y. Altynsarin worked on developing new curricula and textbooks for secondary Kazakh schools. During 1971-1980, 163 textbooks were published for Kazakh and Uygur schools (Khrapchenkov & Khrapchenkov, 1998). The content of school education of that period was analysed A. Kanaev and H. Daun (2002) who pointed out that in school curricula mathematics and sciences were emphasized and humanities and social sciences were laden heavily with Marxist-Leninist ideology. The syllabi of history, literature, and social science were based on the perspective of class struggle, Marx's conflict theory, Marxist-Leninist ideology. A significant drawback of school education content was that it focused on natural sciences more than on humanities which resulted in the development of technocratic thinking and further in mechanistic metaphysical approach to other spheres of life (Nurtazina, 2005, p. 22). As emphasized by Akhmetova, "the educational ideal for the Soviet school was 'all-round and harmonic development' of the person" (Akhmetova, 2002, p. 16). The ideal goal was raising the Soviet human, with Soviet thinking, with priority of Soviet ideology over the national ideology, collectivism over individuality. This ideal was 'elevated' both in the sense of high social mission of education, and in the sense that it was based on the contradictory ideology of the future ideal state of the society. On the one hand, it was far from real life and put forward too high-flown goals. On the other hand, these high-flown goals were underlying the strategy of raising a 'know all' person. At the same time, little attention was given to the development of individual abilities, skills of independent work, culture of self-education, and creative ways of acquiring knowledge (Akhmetova, 2002, pp. 16-17).

Communist ideology was the core not only of education content, but also of extracurricular activities, which were supervised by non-governmental organizations - Pioneers and the Komsomol. On the one hand, they helped to create and disseminate the Soviet and Communist

ideology, on the other hand, they cultivated the values and ideals of goodness, justice, collectivism, labour, unity of people, equal social conditions of education and health care for all. All pupils from grades 4 to 8 were members of Pioneer Organization, while the process of selection of the candidates to Komsomol was stricter. The Pioneer movement utilized various forms of educating school children: Timur movement (assistance to war veterans and elderly people) was aimed at developing care for elderly people; Subbotniks (working on Saturdays) was aimed at labour education, military games Zarnitsa (“Summer Lightning”) and Orlyonok (“Young Eagle”), as well as hiking tours were aimed at patriotic education, etc. During the further period in the history of former Soviet Republics, due to the changes in the ideology, the experiences gained during the Soviet period were rejected, and the common values and orientations were lost.

In 1980, a new school curriculum was adopted focusing on vocational education at high school level, which was supported by the growth of inter-school learning-production complexes where pupils were to have their field experience - 298 such complexes were set up in collective farms at enterprises (Kaliev & Imasheva, 2009, p. 217). At the same time, due to the need to develop science and industry, another goal of education the USSR was to provide profound knowledge based on the latest developments in science. (Pogosian, 2012, p. 282). For that purpose a school reform was to introduce new school subjects (including computer science) to start teaching children at schools at the age of six. In 1985, it was envisioned that the school reform would be completed by 1995. However, due to the political and economic changes this reform was not implemented, as during the 1980s, the period of stagnation in the Soviet Union began and later the USSR collapsed.

## **Discussion**

The Soviet period of the development of Kazakhstani school education may be described as a big contribution to the breakthrough in this sphere. It resulted in the elimination of illiteracy and the transition to the general secondary 8-year education, it enhanced the public education traditions and the value of knowledge, it introduced the world culture and Russian culture, it also brought about the establishment of the Kazakh intelligentsia and the development of science, industry, agriculture; it made it possible for

women to participate in professional activities, and fostered the separation of religious and secular education.

During the fifty years of the Soviet period, the school education infrastructure was set up and it became a social and economic foundation for the development of the society and the state. Kazakhstan transformed from an agrarian civilization to an industrial one. It is important to note that Soviet Union nuclear test site in Semipalatinsk region is situated in the territory of Kazakhstan, and the first spaceship with the first spaceman Yu Gagarin was launched from Baikonur which is also situated in Kazakhstan.

The Soviet school reforms leading to the progress in education development were driven by the economic and political factors. The economic factors that had an essential impact on education development are the intensive development of economy, industrialization, collectivization, and development of natural resources (Asylbekov, 1993). All that required a huge amount of work force with primary and professional level of education. The political driving force involved the development of consolidating Communist ideology, which resulted in the ideologically loaded mass system of education (Pogosian, 2012, p. 301).

Arguably, the construction of the Soviet system of education ensured Communist ideology priorities in people's minds that for a long period of time restricted the views on teaching humanities by imposing a Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist approach, it promoted education which limited national self-identification.

In general, the Soviet period of Kazakhstani school education development, especially starting with the 1960s, followed the same directions common to all the Soviet republics, as education was governed centrally from Moscow, and this period is characterised by strengthening the Communist Party monopoly in education and by two main trends of the reforms: linking school education with labour and raising the content of education up to the level of world standards (Pogosian, 2012, p. 279).

Another trend of school education development, common to all Soviet republics, is that of "russification" which seems to be natural, as Russian was the state language of the USSR. During the Soviet period, the Russian language was the dominant one in Kazakhstan in all the spheres, including education. As contended by Fierman (2006), from 1930s till the disintegration of the Soviet Union, it was the Communist Party that actively promoted the Russian language as a "common bond uniting the multiethnic Soviet people" (Fierman, 2006, p. 98).

But it should be pointed out that, though a common policy, the efficiency of ‘russification’ was different in Soviet republics depending on the demographic factors. This becomes evident if we compare, for example, Kazakh SSR with Armenian SSR, the smallest Soviet republic in terms of the territory, with a practically monoethnic population<sup>1</sup> where Russian was used mainly by the elite and intelligentsia, and Armenian was used as the language of everyday communication (Manasian, 2008). In contrast, Kazakh SSR, the largest republic in terms of its territory, became the destination of WWII Stalin ethnic deportations (Yakovlev, 2005) and WWII evacuations from different parts of the USSR, besides that, it also accommodated a big inflow of non-native residents who came to develop the Virgin Lands in 1950s. Kazakhstan was the only Soviet republic in which the number of Kazakh population was below 40%, and the quantity of the Russian population was over 40%.

Arguably, the policy of ‘russification’ was more successful here as the multiethnic population did need a common language for communication. As the dynamics of the quantity of schools and pupils in 1940-1965 in Kazakhstan shows (see table below)<sup>2</sup>, the percentage of Kazakh schools revealed a pattern of overall steady decline from 1939 till 1965. At the time of the collapse of the USSR, Kazakh schools, those offering education in the Kazakh language, were mainly located in rural areas, in Alma-Ata.

*Table 1. Dynamics of the Quantity of Schools and Pupils in 1940-1965 in Kazakhstan*

Academic years	Total number of schools	Including Kazakh schools	Total number of pupils	Including Kazakhs (in Kazakh, Russian and other schools)
1939/1940	8,148	4,419 (54%)	1,052,629	408,808 (39%)
1940/1941	7,566	3,714 (49%)	1,061,651	368,617 (35%)
1945/1946	7,720	3,628 (47%)	741,046	226,947 (31%)
1950/1951	8,712	4,054 (47%)	1,240,706	428,141 (35%)
1955/1965	8,728	3,395 (39%)	1,172,956	425,393 (36%)

There were only 2 Kazakh schools out of over the total of 100 schools; and only Russian was used at universities as instruction medium starting with the third year of studies. This was the background of Kazakhstan school education when in 1991 Kazakhstan started its independent development.

<sup>1</sup> According to Census, in 1989 there were 93, 3% of ethnic Armenians residing in Armenia (Demoscope weekly [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_89.php?reg=13](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php?reg=13)).

<sup>2</sup> The data are drawn from (Sembayev, 1958).

### **School Education Development during the Post-Soviet Period**

In 1991, a new period of history of Kazakhstan education development began, the period of national self-determination, of searching for the optimal ways of development, of integration processes and of permanent reforms dynamics. The years of independence started with a very hard period of constructing the national state. The reforms in education were driven by the economic, political and cultural factors. The economy of Kazakhstan was going through a profound economic crisis with the introduction of a market economy and with economic relations with former Soviet republics falling apart. The economic crisis had a large impact on the educational policy of the state and in financing education. The amount of funding for education dropped from 5.7% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1990 to 3.5% in 1991-1992, and from 3.2% in 1994 to 4.5% in 1995. Later funding for education stabilized at the level of 4.3% in 1996 and 4.1% in 1999 (State Programme 'Education', 2002).

The main political focus was on searching for self-determination and the development of an independent state. The cultural factors having an impact on education dealt with the restoration of the national culture, of the Kazakh language and the development of national history.

The main objectives of educational development at this period were associated with the construction of the national education system in Kazakhstan.

### **Periodization of the development of education in Independent Kazakhstan**

The issues of the development of school education in Kazakhstan after the Soviet period have not been so far profoundly investigated. As the analysis of recent education research focus revealed, '46.3% of theses written from 1985 to 2009 in the area of education are dealing with secondary schools while the history of Kazakhstani pedagogy and the history of educational institutions have not been covered yet' (Kusainov, Naby & Taubaeva, 2010, p. 27). Thus this research makes a significant contribution to the field. The most comprehensive research conducted in 2012 by the scholars of Nazarbayev University, Cambridge University and Pennsylvania University identifies two stages in the development of independent Kazakhstan education: the first starting in 1990s, and the

second one starting in 2000, the latter being related to entering the international educational arena.

Arguably, based on the studies of the demographic situation, the development of schools, the analyses of curricula and the state expenditures on education, there are three stages of the development of secondary education within this period:

1) 1991/1995 – the stage of the crisis of the development of secondary education, with the reduction of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) spent on education to 3.5%. This stage ends in 1995 with the adoption of the new Constitution of Kazakhstan and the return to mandatory secondary education.

2) 1996/2006 – the stage of stabilization of the development of education, with the preparation for the reforms and the transition to the 12-year school education;

3) 2007- present – (2007 being the year of the adoption of the new Law on Education which legislatively confirmed the orientation to the world educational arena) the stage of the strategic development of secondary education, the implementation of reforms for transition to 12-year secondary education, the introduction of competence-based approach, and e-learning.

#### *1991-1995*

The first years of Kazakhstan independence were the years of a profound economic and social crisis, with a significant outflow of Kazakhstan population and a decline in the natural growth of the population. On the one hand, for Kazakhstani people, it was a difficult time of unemployment, poverty and crimes. According to the Asian Development Bank (1998), the poverty level in Kazakhstan grew from 15.5% in 1989 to 34.6% in 1996. The unemployment level in 1996 was 4.2%, and among the unemployed, there were 40.9% of young people aged 14-24. By 1999, the unemployment decreased to 3.8%, with the young people of 28.9% (Silova, 2011). On the other hand, the 1990s were a period of reconstruction of the national language and culture, and of new archeological discoveries.

The Constitution of Kazakhstan of 1993 guaranteed the right for free school and higher education provided by public educational institutions. At the same time, up to 1995, the idea of compulsory secondary education was rejected, and only nine years of the eleven years of general school education became obligatory.

According to Khrapchenkov and Khrapchenkov (1998, p. 6) “within a short time, the rejection of compulsory secondary education caused severe damage to the younger generation”. The economic and social crisis led to the decrease in the level of education and to the emergence of child homelessness and an increase of juvenile delinquency.

In general, the first stage of the development of education in the independent Kazakhstan saw education policy being formulated. The main feature of the Law ‘On Education’ (Law of Republic of Kazakhstan ‘On education’ 1992) is the idea of preserving the positive experience of the Soviet system of education and of adding the national component into its content. New standards for secondary education were introduced and new textbooks were written. The content of courses on the history of Kazakhstan, Kazakh language and culture, and Geography of Kazakhstan were revised. All schools introduced such compulsory subjects as Kazakh Language, and Kazakh Literature. It was also a period when the principles of humanization, democratization and decentralization of education were introduced which led to diversification of schools, and with the development of a market economy, private educational institutions emerged.

#### *1996-2006*

*The second stage* of school education development continued the policies of the previous stage in the conditions of economic and demographic crisis when the quantity of Kazakhstan residents decreased from 16.38 million in 1991 to 14.958 in 1999, and in 2002 it reached its absolute minimum – 14.851. The number of Kazakhstan residents aged up to 17 was 36.9% in 1991 and it reached the minimum of 34.5% in 1999. The lowest indicator of birth rate (14.6) was observed in 1999. Consequently, the number of schools from 1996 started to decrease.

Besides the demographic problems, in the end of 1990s Kazakhstan faced the problem of school absenteeism which required taking urgent measures for getting pupils back to school. The Ministry of Education reported that 26,900 children did not attend schools in 1997, and that in 1998, 25,418 pupils returned to schools, and in 2001 there were only 645 children not attending schools. At the same time, it should be pointed out that the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported in 2000 that 7600 children did not attend schools (Silova, 2002), which means that the situation with school absenteeism was not solved easily and quickly.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that notwithstanding the hard situation, the total number of school pupils in Kazakhstan in 1991-1999 was still high (93-94%) compared for instance with 88-89% in Uzbekistan and 83-94% in Tajikistan which may be attributed to the traditional value of knowledge in Kazakhstan.

The Law 'On Education' of 1999 re-established compulsory secondary education and the following stages of secondary education were set up: primary education (grades 1-4), basic secondary education (grades 5-9), high school education (grades 10-11). In order to achieve the goal of diversifying secondary education, there were five main types of secondary schools established: the comprehensive school, grammar school, comprehensive grammar school, and lyceum school (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan 'On Education', 1999).

This Law also introduced decentralization of secondary education governance through establishing different levels of governance bodies. The local executive bodies (Alimats) were in charge of financing school education. The Ministry of Education made the main decisions and coordinated the activities of other bodies. But due to the bad economic situation, school principals had many problems with finances – they lacked money for timely payment of salaries, and for paying for school utilities (electricity and for oil in rural areas). Under these conditions, many teachers left schools to work in other sectors, or to emigrate to their historic homelands – ethnical Russians, Germans, Greeks, Ukrainians, Belarussians left Kazakhstan. On the other hand, in the rural areas it was the school that managed to establish a stable financial situation, as the teachers knew that notwithstanding the delays they would be eventually paid their salaries by the state and local budget. The schools set up governing boards, parents' committees' funds, and started offering extra classes for fees.

From 2000 to 2005, the financial situation in Kazakhstan stabilized and that had a positive impact on funding education, which amounted to 3.2-3.4% of GDP (National Programme, 2004). However, at first the educational policy was more focused on stabilizing the situation and lacked global strategic orientation. The most dynamic changes in this period concerned the higher education system, which later led to the transformation of school education.

Between the years of 1995 and 2000, the Ministry of Education adopted several concepts of education development and the most relevant of them (Concept of Developing Historical Consciousness (1995); Concept of Ethno-cultural Education (1996) concerned the development of history

consciousness, and ethno-cultural education which was followed by the adoption of the State Programme 'Education' (2002) which put forward the goal of the integration of education in the international arena. Kazakh Academy of Education named after Y. Altynsarin started the development of new educational standards for schools, new curricula and new textbooks: as up to that time the old Soviet textbooks had been used in schools (Silova, 2002).

The new standards introduced the competence approach and the concept of 'education oriented to the outcome' (Zhadrina, 2004, p. 10). As M. Zhadrina points out, it was since the 1930s that the underlying principle of designing school education was orientation to knowledge, but not to the outcomes of education (Zhadrina, 2004, p. 10). Based on the new approach, school education was to become more variable, and schools were supposed to design and introduce their components into curricula. The extent of the variety gradually increased from 1 hour per week in primary school to 3 hours per week in secondary school, and to 17 hours per week in high school. At high school level, profiled schools were introduced: some high schools specialized in social sciences and humanities, and some schools specialized in natural sciences. As Saytimova emphasizes, this is a basic difference from the former Soviet school where the same school subjects were to be studied till the end of high school (Saytimova, 2011, p. 11). On the one hand, the new focus was on the individual features and abilities of pupils who could choose which type of schools they would prefer to go. On the other hand, in the conditions of financial problems and lack of resources, it was still not easy for schools to provide a big variety of new school subjects (Saytimova, 2011, p. 11) which could provide variability and choices for pupils.

During 1996-2006 a new generation of school textbooks was written, and in the period from 2000 to 2005, 58 million copies of 832 textbooks were published, including 2397 paper textbooks and 321 electronic textbooks (Damitov, 2007).

The 'Concept of Development of Education up to 2015' was developed in 2003 and was approved in 2004. The purpose of the Concept was the identification of strategic priorities in the development of education for building a national model of multi-level continuing education integrated into the world educational arena and meeting the needs of the individual and the society (Concept of Development of Education, 2004). The Concept set as one of the strategic priorities of secondary education a transition to 12 years of schooling. This idea is rooted in the global trends

of education development (about 80% of the countries in the world have 12 years of schooling). Remarkably, other former Soviet states (Moldova, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine) have also shifted to a 12-year school education.

The aims of the reforms in education at this stage were clearly defined as the integration into the world educational arena, and the permanent development of continuous education, which became the basis for the State Program of Education, designed for the period of 2005-2010. One of the strategies of this Program was raising quality of education and human resources development. This orientation to raising the quality of education required an independent assessment of school pupils' learning outcomes. For that purpose, to set up a system of external assessment of learning outcomes, since 2004 the Uniform National Testing (UNT) was introduced in Kazakhstan which replaced for school graduates the entrance examination to HEIs (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2004).

In 2006, President Nazarbayev in his message to the people of Kazakhstan said: 'The Strategy is for Kazakhstan to joining the top 50 most competitive countries in the world. Kazakhstan is on the threshold of a new breakthrough in its development' (Nazarbayev, 2006). Nazarbayev also emphasized the relevance of education, with educational reform being one of the most important tools to achieve real competitiveness of Kazakhstan, and, arguably, the key strategy of further reforms being related to the achievement of education competitiveness.

#### *2007 – present*

The third stage of the development of education started with the adoption of the new Law 'On Education' of 2007 which established the transition to the 12-year school education and to the tertiary level higher education, with all levels of education corresponding to Western education systems.

The transition to the 12-year school education was planned to start in 2007 and to be completed by 2010, but the system of secondary education turned out to be too inert to the reforms due to its cumbersome nature requiring high costs to reform it (Nazarbayev, 2007). Further, the teachers' community was involved in disputes and disagreement concerning the suggested increase of the school education period. As a result, it turned out to be impossible to put these goals into practice due to the poor resources a lack of a technological basis of school education, and a lack of proper teachers' preparation and support for the planned transition. To overcome the problem, President Nazarbayev in 2007 in his message to the people of

Kazakhstan 'New Kazakhstan in the New World' declared an initiative to start a program of the construction of 100 schools and 100 hospitals (Nazarbayev, 2007). During 2007, 52 new schools were set up, in 2008 there were 90 new schools set up, in 2009 there were 83 schools constructed, and in 2011 68 schools were built, all funded by the local and republican budgets (National Report, 2011). The schools were equipped with new digital facilities - interactive whiteboards, smart boards, and computers with Internet access. These measures gradually prepared the basis for the transformation of secondary education and the implementation of the strategy of computerization of education. Currently it is planned to construct 522 schools by 2016 that would set the basis for the transition to 12 years of schooling. The financing of education is also gradually increased from 3.7% of GDP in 2007 to 4.2% in 2012 (National Report, 2012).

### **Discussion: current trends of school education development in Kazakhstan**

The current trends of the development of school education in Kazakhstan are based on the goals put forward within the period of Kazakhstani independence, with two main vectors of educational policy: those of the national reconstruction that preserved the best achievements of the Soviet school system; and those of integration into the world educational arena through the development of education quality achieved by a cultural paradigm of education hallmarked by the competence approach to education.

The most relevant activities for reaching these goals deal with the issues concerning the construction of a new school model, participation in international research on assessment of quality of education, and the instruction medium.

#### *New school model*

In 2010 the 'State Program of Education Development up to 2020' was adopted which envisioned the transition to the 12-year school system in the period from 2015 till 2020. The program put forward the goal of raising the competitiveness of education and human capital development by providing accessibility of quality education for sustainable economic growth (State Programme, 2010). The State Programme identifies the goal of the reforms

of school education as the development of the intellectually, physically and spiritually mature citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan, to ensure success in a rapidly changing world, and to develop competitive human capital for economic well-being (State Programme, 2010). Reaching this goal requires new standards of education and a new model of school.

A new standard of a 12-years model of school education based on a competence approach is being currently developed for implementation (Framework Foundations of State Educational Standards of 12-year Secondary Education, 2013). The change of educational standards also concerns the development of new educational content. The basic principle of the new educational content is the creation of a humane educational environment in each school, and an environment that encourages the development of moral and spiritual qualities of the personality, such as: self-cognition, self-determination and self-realization (Aitbaeva, 2013). Another novelty of the new standard is the introduction of integrated subjects, such as 'Me and the Surrounding World', 'Introduction into Science', 'Artistic Labour', and 'Physical Culture and Health' at primary level.

The current discussions on the issues of further development of school education in Kazakhstan, particularly a new school model, are evidence of a complete departure from the former Soviet commanding administrative management of education.

The discussions concerning these issues are currently under way. The new model of a 12-year school model is supposed to be based on three stages of education: 4+6+2. This structure corresponds to the classical Soviet model of pedagogical age periodization, while in the Western tradition of school education, the most common model of school education stages is 6+3+3 (Kusainov, 2014). At present a project 'Conceptual Foundations of Profiled Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan' has been developed suggesting that the level of high school education should be subjected to professionalisation. The underlying idea of the project is the introduction of 4-5 profession specific high school orientations.

There are two groups of scholars working on the development of the new standards – one affiliated to The National Academy of Education, the other – to The Kazakh National Pedagogical University named after Abai. The latter suggested 13 profiles of high school (Aytbaeva, 2013). While the discussions regarding the 12-year school model go on, 12-year schools have been introduced on an experimental basis in 104 schools of

Kazakhstan, 45 of them being rural schools (National Report, 2012). The plan is to make a 'mild' transition to the 12 years of school education.

#### *Integration into the world educational arena*

The goal of integrating into the world educational arena made it necessary to participate in the international research on assessment quality of education, such as PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study). In 2007, Kazakhstan's students took part in the international comparative study of TIMSS – 2007, and their achievements were rated the 5th in math and the 11th in natural sciences among the students of grade 4 out of 36 countries (State Programme, 2010). In 2009, PISA results of Kazakhstan pupils were not satisfactory. They gained 390 scores in reading literacy, lower than the OECD average of 493, and for mathematical literacy they scored 405 with the OECD average being 496, and for natural sciences literacy they scored 400 with the OECD average being 501. Analyzing these results, Deputy Prime Minister Orynbaev pointed out at a meeting in the Ministry of Education that:

in 2009 Kazakhstani 15 year old school children were placed 59 out of 65 places in their level of functional literacy in the framework of a popular research of OECD, and this is a tough lesson for us. Our school children can solve school problems very well, as was demonstrated by the TIMMS results, however, they are not taught to apply their knowledge in life (Kusainov, 2014, p. 98).

The discussion of these research outcomes informed the school reforms, with the introduction of systemic changes in training teachers, in revising education content and in replacing the outdated methods of teaching (Kusainov, 2014, p. 98).

#### *The issues of the language of instruction*

The issues of the language of school instruction are rooted in the Soviet period of the development of Kazakhstani education (see above). With Kazakhstan gaining its independence, the number of Kazakh classes and schools grew dramatically. In 2011, the number of ethnic Kazakhs was 64% of all Kazakhstan residents, with 22.83% of ethnic Russians, 2.9% of ethnic Uzbeks, 1.9% of ethnic Ukrainians, 1.4% of Uyghurs, 1.2% of

Tatars, 1% of Germans, and 4.5% of other ethnic groups (Demographic Yearbook, 2012, p. 27). In 2011, the amount of pupils taking classes in the Kazakh language was 1,590,700 (63.4%), 819,500 (32.7%) pupils took classes in Russian as the language of instruction, and 98,000 (3.9%) took classes in other languages of instruction (in schools of ethnic diasporas and also with English as the language of instruction). Now in Kazakhstan there are 50% of Kazakh schools, 20% of Russian schools, and about 30% of schools are 'mixed' Kazakh-Russian schools with both Kazakh and Russian as languages of instruction, and there are a small amount of schools with the Uyghur, Uzbek and Tajik languages of instruction. The Russian language is taught in Kazakh schools from grade 3 to grade 11, and the Kazakh language is taught from grade 1 to grade 11. The Kazakh language has now the status of the state language, and Russian is the language of intercultural communication. At the same time, research findings reveal, pupils taking classes in Kazakh as instruction medium have lower levels of achievement (Fierman, 2006, p. 114). These findings provide evidence that at present the schools are not quite ready for using Kazakh as the instruction medium. This situation has been caused by several factors. First, many Kazakh school teachers studied Russian during the Soviet period, and they are not well prepared to teach through the medium of Kazakh because their own professional Kazakh language proficiency is not satisfactory. Second, the quality of Kazakh textbooks is lower than that of the Russian textbooks (Fierman, 2006, p. 113). Finally, the Kazakh language did not develop in academic contexts during the Soviet period. The evidence identifies that the issue of the language of school instruction needs further consideration and development.

The President of Kazakhstan in his message to the people in 2007 suggested starting a cultural project described as 'The Unity of Three Languages' and declared that Kazakhstan must be perceived worldwide as a highly educated country, with its population understanding and speaking three languages: the official Kazakh language, Russian language which is used as the language of international communication and the English language which is used for successful integration into the global economy (Nazarbayev, 2007). The idea of this language trinity is interpreted as a simple and clear formula: Kazakhs must develop their national language, maintain the Russian language, and learn English. This project became part of the educational strategy of Kazakhstan, and from September 2013 English is to be taught from the first year of the primary school.

## **Conclusions**

The development of education during the Soviet period went through several stages with the corresponding goals of illiteracy liquidation, the introduction of compulsory secondary public education, and all educational achievements being underpinned by a strong ideological Communist pressure. The relevance of the contribution of the Soviet period to the development of education in Kazakhstan is emphasized by the growth of literacy levels achieved through making primary and secondary education compulsory for all citizens. This transformed Kazakhstan from an agrarian to an industrialized nation within only half a century (Asylbekov, 1993). On the one hand, this period had positive outcomes manifested in the liquidation of illiteracy, in the development of the new work force and further industrial breakthroughs for the USSR and Kazakhstan. On the other hand, the system of public education strengthened the Soviet Power which became a conductor of the Communist ideology.

In the period of Kazakhstan's independence, the goals of school education became absolutely different: lifelong learning, integration into the global education arena, raising quality of education and education competitiveness, 'the unity of three languages', and computerization. Notwithstanding the differences between the two periods, there is a certain continuity in the development of school education progressing from illiteracy liquidation to enhancing literacy levels and integration into the world educational arena.

The researchers point out that there are commonalities between post-Soviet states in terms of the 'post-socialist education reform package' (Silova, 2011), 'a set of policy reforms symbolizing the adoption of Western educational values including such 'travelling policies' as student-centred learning, the introduction of curriculum standards, decentralization of educational finance and governance, privatisation of higher education, standardisation of student assessment, and liberalisation of textbook publishing' (Silova 2011, p. 3). These commonalities are described as 'westernization' of education, with a transfer of western models of education (Romanenchuk, 2006). This applies to the development of education in Kazakhstan, because since 2005 Kazakh educational development has been following world trends and recommendations. The leading trends of the period of independence of Kazakhstan involve the restoration of the Kazakh school and language, internationalization and globalization of education, democratization, diversification, standardization

of education and orientation for quality of education. However, there is a specific feature of the development of Kazakhstani education – the rise of Kazakh schools and ethno-pedagogical foundations of education. The current reforms of Kazakhstani school education integrate the traditions of the Soviet system of education with the national traditions of public education, along with the global trends in education development. That is why it is possible to claim that the system of school education in Kazakhstan has a distinctive face.

At the same time, the development of school education in Kazakhstan is still under way, and most of the goals have not been reached yet and many of the issues discussed above need further development. As recent publications show, the quality of school textbooks is still very low, as well as the quality of teacher education, and the frequent changes of educational standards are taking the teachers' time and attention rather than leading to positive results (Quality of educational services, 2012). Notwithstanding the problems, Kazakhstan education progress demonstrates high indicators of development: in 2007 the level of primary education in Kazakhstan was ranked 7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> in the world (Education for All, 2007); in 2008 Kazakhstan was ranked among 26 states with the literacy level of adult education amounting to 97% (Education for All by 2015, 2008); in 2010 the Kazakhstani education level was rated as 14 by *Newsweek Daily of World's Best Countries of 2010* (Interactive Infographic of the World's Best Countries, 2010). These indicators of education development provide evidence of the positive outcomes of the current reforms and of prospective successful progress.

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