

Internationalization of Higher Education in Kazakhstan

Dinara Bekbauova (Corresponding author)

School of Public Affairs, University of Science and Technology of China,

Hefei, Anhui, 230026, China

Tel: 86-13075566310 E-mail: 2501673971@qq.com

Issah Iddrisu

School of Public Affairs, University of Science and Technology of China,

Hefei, Anhui, 230026, China

Tel: 86-18755185009 E-mail: issah@mail.ustc.edu.cn

Amran Said Suleiman

School of Public Affairs, University of Science and Technology of China,

Hefei, Anhui, 230026, China

Tel: +86-15695656629 E-mail: amran@mail.ustc.edu.cn

Rathny Suy

School of Public Affairs, University of Science and Technology of China,

Hefei, Anhui, 230026, China

Tel: +86-18755182753 E-mail: rathny@mail.ustc.edu.cn

Aigul Islamjanova

School of Public Affairs, University of Science and Technology of China,

Hefei, Anhui, 230026, China

Tel: 86-18655377002 E-mail: kedy_90@mail.ru

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Abstract

Over the past ten years, internationalization of higher education has become a priority in Kazakhstan's educational policy. The importance of internationalization is reflected by the increasing exchange of students and scientists, the emergence of many international programmes and collaboration of universities, increased funding for students and research projects. This work deals with the internationalization of higher education, therefore, begins with the concept of this phenomenon, explained the role of internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan, and also discussed the changes occurring in the education system of Kazakhstan and its current state. The accession of Kazakhstan to the Bologna process, as well studied Kazakhstan's efforts for internationalization of higher education.

Keywords: Internationalization, Higher education, Kazakhstan, Student exchange, Academic mobility, Bologna process

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, internationalization has become one of the most essential components of the educational policy of countries all over the world. Internationalization is the interrelationship of different states, as a result of the emergence of international organizations and associations in various spheres of our life. It is also the integration of international goals into the providing of higher education. Jane Knight (2003) suggested a new definition for the 21st century:

“Internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (Knight, 2003).

Internationalization is not only the exchange of students between countries, but also increasing the accessibility of higher education, the universalization of knowledge, the formation of international quality standards and the development of innovative higher education, expansion and strengthening international cooperation, enhancing academic mobility. Internationalization of higher education implies a profound rethinking of the content of training programs that should guide future specialists to a global thinking and vision, to formulate such knowledge and skills that will make them able to be competitive in the international labor market. Ardakani, F. B., et al. (2011) stated:

“Internationalization deals with the issues of learning and teaching, education, evaluation, professional development, the measurement and the quality of graduates. It's also concerned with the values and intercultural understanding and can be considered within the usual educational programs, in higher education, or in the training courses for researchers or academic members of universities” (Ardakani, Yarmohammadian, Abari, & Fathi, 2011).

Internationalization involves the international context of the subjects studied at all levels of higher education (Shaimukhanova, Nugman, & Suleimenova, 2012). In turn, quality

education determines the future of development. On this basis, the internationalization of higher education is an integral part in the provision of higher education, as the quality of higher education determines the future development of the individual and the country. In the situation of globalization and integration, Kazakhstan follows suit in the internationalization processes. After gaining independence, Kazakhstan, like all post-Soviet countries, needed reforms in all its activities. It required highly skilled personnel who were to realize further reforms and adequately represent the country on the world stage. Education is one of the most important institutions of the state and society, responsible for the development of human capital. Education and training have always been the best conductors of strategic ideas for the development of the country. The experience of foreign countries shows that the degree of development of the education area is practically identified with the level of state competitiveness; therefore education is a strategic priority for Kazakhstan (Nurmagambetov, 2015). The work assessed the efforts of Kazakhstan in the process of internationalization in higher education. The study also discussed the changes occurring in the education system of Kazakhstan in its current state after joining the Bologna process and the role of internationalization in higher education of Kazakhstan.

2. The Role of Internationalization in Higher Education of Kazakhstan

In relation to Kazakhstan, internationalization is another step towards sustainable development of the state. This phenomenon is as important for Kazakhstan in achieving the country's intentions of becoming a more competitive country. It consists of the introduction of international strategies in all areas of education and research, both at the national policy level and at the level of educational institutions. Internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan serves as a tool to better the quality of higher education institutions. It also serves as the fusion of national and global character in providing education, upgrading the higher education system and improving the quality of knowledge of the entire nation. Graduates need to have extensive knowledge and skills required to work in a global economy. To achieve that need to operationalized internalized research activities recognized at the international level, operationalized experience and foreign expertise for the improvement of the quality of universities in Kazakhstan to attract foreign students and teachers (Kitaibekova, 2009). In other words, internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan is a change that will revolutionize the education sector of the country. In implementing the dictates to the latter, the country turns to benefit from its weak educational system to a stronger one. Much of its curriculum will be revolutionized to come at par with the rest of the world. With external influences due to collaborations, will bring change in institutions which will result in effectiveness in its activities. To achieve the most of efficiency, Omirbayev (2015) states the main strategies to internationalization of education in Kazakhstan, which will help put the country at the world level in higher education. In his view, the exchange of students and teachers, implementation of joint educational programmes; dual diploma education; conducting and implementation of joint scientific research and projects; development of cooperation in the field of assessing the quality of education; joint creation of international universities (Omirbayev, 2015) are the surest ways to achieve the intended objective of opening up the educational sector to the rest of the world. The internal motive of opening up the higher educational system is to invite the best brains to the country. This will help speed

up the country's desire to equip its citizens with the needed skills and experience to take the challenge of its growing economy.

3. Government Initiatives and the Current State of Internationalization in Kazakhstan

After gaining independence in 1991, Kazakhstan, like all post-Soviet countries, needed reforms in all its activities. It required highly skilled personnel, who were to carry out further reforms and worthily represent the country on the world stage. In 1993, by the decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, established the International Scholarship "Bolashak" (Bolashak, 2016). It provided an opportunity for Kazakhstan's talented youth to study abroad. Presidential scholarship "Bolashak" was the first step in the internationalization of higher education. The program is still operating today, and has helped many improved their knowledge and still ready to serve in the education sector of Kazakhstan.

The first group of Kazakhstan students in the framework of the "Bolashak" program went to foreign universities in 1994. In total, about 800 scholarships were awarded between 1994 and 2004. Since 2005, the number of scholarship holders of the prestigious program has been increased to 3 000 people in a year. Kazakhstan students are mostly sent to countries such as the USA, Great Britain, Germany, Russia, Australia, Austria, Hungary, Denmark, Spain, Italy, Canada, China, France, Czech Republic, Sweden, Switzerland and Japan (Jumaly, 2009). Students study for bachelors, masters, PhD and short-term fellowships. In 2013, "Bolashak" educational scholarship was awarded to 299 applicants. Of these, half were masters and PhD students, the rest were interns. The number of undergraduates, approximately 60% was engineering experts: specialists in the field of information technology, oil and gas, petrochemical, energy, engineering, technology management. In turn, the remaining 40% were economists, lawyers, financiers, and experts in the field of cardiac surgery, oncology and reconstructive surgery. In the same year, within the doctoral program were trained sociologists, political scientists and experts in the field of public administration (uchi.kz, 2013). Under the Bolashak program, the number of scholarships for doctoral studies increased from 25 in 2014 and 40 in 2015. In 2015, there were 2 110 scholarships and in 2014 the number was 2 308. This included those under the Master's program (1 412 people or 66.9%) (Ministry of Education and Science, 2016).

For 23 years of implementing the "Bolashak" program, 9 339 people received high-quality education in the top universities in the world (Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2016). Among post-Soviet countries, Kazakhstan became the first country to launch an educational scholarship of this kind, and this program also served as an example for the members of The Commonwealth of Independent States. Similar programs in other countries of The Commonwealth of Independent States are practically non-existent. From the beginning of the 2000s, it was the same only in Ufa (a city in Russia, the capital of the Republic of Bashkortostan), and more recently, from 2013, in a limited format in Moscow ("Social support program for citizens of the Russian Federation, self-enrolled in leading foreign Educational organizations") (Kenzhe, 2016).

In the modern world of globalization, new efforts, reforms and initiatives are required. In 2009, in the lecture "Kazakhstan in the post-crisis world: "an intellectual breakthrough into the future", the Head of State outlined a high level of modernization of the economy, but in

order to realize the nation's potential, the President stressed that the country needs an intellectual revolution (The Lecture Of President Of Kazakhstan, 2009). Then the leader of the country proposed a project "Intellectual nation 2020". The main goal of the project is the development and transformation of Kazakhstan into a country with competitive human capital (Kazakhstan Today, 2008). Also in 2010, president Nursultan Nazarbayev approves the State Program for the Development of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan from 2011 to 2020 (Government, 2010). To keep pace with time, corresponding to the world standards and adequately respond to the process of internationalization, the government took various measures. Even during the crisis in 1997, in his message to the people of Kazakhstan the President said: "*We must achieve provision of quality educational services across the country at the level of world standards*" (The President's address to the people of Kazakhstan, 1997). Along with this, in 2015 the President adopted a new national plan "100 concrete steps" for 5 institutional reforms aimed at improving the quality of the educational system in Kazakhstan (Government, 2015). The above mentioned a project "Intellectual nation 2020" and the national plan "100 concrete steps" are aimed at fulfilling the country's goal of becoming one of the 30 most educationally competitive countries in the world. Within the framework of the program "100 concrete steps", the Leader of the country identified the following steps:

- *improving the quality of human capital based on the standards of OECD countries;*
- *Modernization of teacher education and professional development;*
- *Preparation of qualified staff in 10 colleges and 10 universities for the 6 key sectors of the economy with subsequent dissemination of experience in other educational institutions of the country;*
- *Gradual expansion of academic and managerial autonomy of universities based on the experience of "Nazarbayev University";*
- *Transformation of private universities in the non-profit organization in accordance with international practice;*
- *Gradual transition to English language learning in the education system in high schools and universities (Government, 2015).*

4. International Collaborations

Internationalization of higher education is aimed at attracting foreign specialists and scientists, the development of international cooperation in education area and the adoption of foreign experience in the field of education management.

An important event in the internationalization and integration of the country's higher education was the accession of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Bologna process in 2010, becoming the 47th fully-fledged member of the Bologna Process (Erasmus+ National office in Kazakhstan, 2015). The Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999 by 29 European countries in Bologna. This Declaration on international cooperation in the field of higher education marked the beginning of the Bologna process and aimed at the European higher education area (EHEA) objectives. This included the introduction of a precisely defined and comparable degrees, as well as a two-stage structure; the adoption of a credit system similar to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS); promotion of mobility; the

development of European cooperation in the field of quality control and the enlargement of the European aspects of higher education (Erasmus+, 2015).

The Bologna Declaration obliges all member countries to perform certain tasks, the main ones of which are:

- *The adoption of a system that everyone understands and easily compares documents on higher education (a single appendix to the diploma);*
- *Transition to a multi-level system of higher education, based on two cycles of preparation;*
- *The introduction of a common system of study credits, in which case the European credit transfer system (ECTS) is provided;*
- *Development of European cooperation in the field of quality assurance of higher education;*
- *Lifelong learning;*
- *International mobility of students and staff;*
- *Independent universities;*
- *Participation of students in the administration of higher education.*(Zakirova, Narenova, Kenshinbay, & Usenbayeva, 2009), (Yergebekov & Temirbekova, 2012).

Today, Kazakhstan is successfully a member of the largest space for cooperative education in the world. The fulfillment of the tasks of the Bologna Process for Kazakhstan is an important mechanism in the internationalization of education. One of the priority objectives of the Bologna Process is academic mobility; it is an integral part of global processes and trends in the system of higher education. In this direction, the strategy of academic mobility of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2012-2020 is adopted, where the basic concepts of academic mobility are outlined. Increasing the attractiveness of Kazakhstan higher education is the main goal that will be met through quality assurance of educational and research programs. Internationalization aims at achieving a balanced mobility and the development of multicultural society. Within the framework of the program of academic mobility, it is envisaged that by 2020, 20% of Kazakhstan students will be mobile (Government, 2012). Thus, Kazakhstani universities will send students and teaching staff for training; attract foreign specialists from Europe, the United States, Southeast Asia, Russia, etc. The number of Kazakhstan citizens studying in foreign universities increased from 36 thousand in 2009 to 49 thousand in 2013 (Excluding Kazakhstani students in Chinese universities). Of the 213 000 foreign students in Russian universities, 49 252 (23%) were citizens of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan ranks 1st by the amount of foreign students in Russia (Ministry of Education and Science, 2016). As mentioned earlier, the main source of outgoing mobility for citizens of Kazakhstan is the “Bolashak” program. For more than 20 years, 11 000 people have had the opportunity to study at the top 200 universities in the world. Academic mobility programs are funded by the state, university funds, scholarships of partner universities, international grants, student self-sufficiency, etc. (The program Erasmus+, 2015).

Since 2009 under the program “Attracting foreign scientists” every year the universities of Kazakhstan invited more than 300 scientists from leading universities in the world (Omirbayev, 2015). The grant covers accommodation, transportation costs, cost of living and

fees. Since the beginning of the program, about 7 000 professors from Europe, the United States, Asia and Russia visited Kazakhstan and taught at universities. During this period, 209 joint research projects were launched and 86 units of educational, scientific and methodological literature were jointly published. The main funding for the “Attract foreign scientists” program is provided by the presidential scholarship “Bolashak”, the National Center for Professional Development “Orleu”, Erasmus Mundus, and the Tempas program (The program Erasmus+, 2015). Along with this main goal for the internationalization of Kazakhstan’s higher education is the development of cooperation of Kazakhstani universities with foreign universities, creation of joint international programmes. Such international programs like Erasmus+, Tempus and Erasmus Mundus made a great contribution to the cooperation of Kazakhstani and European universities. In addition, such organizations and programs as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), The Agency of Francophone universities (AUF), the German academic exchange service (DAAD), The Fulbright United States, also promote the development of cooperation between Kazakhstan and foreign universities. Also, leading Kazakhstani universities are members of the European Association of Universities (EAU), EURASHE (European Association of Higher Education Institutions) and International Association of Universities (IAU). International cooperation allows Kazakhstan to learn from the experience of foreign states in the field of education, together with this the opportunity to improve the quality of education and meet the requirements of globalization.

5. Current Framework

At present, the internationalization of Kazakhstani education has taken several forms and changes. A three-level model is implemented, which includes educational programs of higher (bachelor) and postgraduate education (master and PhD) based on credit training technology. Graduates of Kazakhstani universities can receive the European Diploma Supplement, recognized by all member countries of the Bologna Process (The program Erasmus+, 2015), sending students and teachers abroad; attracting foreign teachers, professors and researchers; the attraction of foreign students in Kazakhstan; development of joint educational programs with foreign universities, the system of double diplomas, modular study abroad; introduction of foreign textbooks and multilingual programs in the educational process; opening of language centers.

In 2012, there was an approval of the National qualifications framework (NQF), which contains eight qualification levels, which corresponds to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and levels of education (Government Doc., 2012). The European qualifications framework (EQF) was adopted in 2008, which contains 8 levels of education to learning throughout life. The European Union countries until 2010, tied their professional qualifications to the EQF. From post-Soviet countries, Kazakhstan was the first to implement a National qualification framework (NQF). For Kazakhstan, the adoption of a framework is important, since this reform leads to changes in educational cultures and traditional education systems, such reforms are needed by Kazakhstan to meet world standards (Narbekova, 2015). Also, the majority of universities of Kazakhstan use Kazakhstan system of credit transfer based on the European credit transfer system (ECTS). ECTS is one of the important conditions of the Bologna process in the development of internationalization in higher

education. The European credit transfer system is a unified system of evaluation of educational work in universities of Europe. The transfer of Kazakhstani credits into the European allows create conditions for academic mobility; to ensure the quality, attractiveness and competitiveness of Kazakhstan universities; allows to convert Kazakhstan documents on higher education for participation in the international educational environment; implementation of joint international programmes; implementation of double-diploma education; development of mechanisms of qualification. The use of ECTS in combination with a framework of qualifications based on learning outcomes makes programs and qualifications more transparent and facilitates the recognition of qualifications, including those obtained abroad (Omirbayev, 2015). In addition to all of the above, the quality control of education and the quality assurance system of education are in parallel functioning in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Measures are planned for a gradual transition from quality control of education to the quality assurance system of education. In the sphere of higher education, the completion of this transition was planned by 2017, in the sphere of technical and vocational education by 2020 (The program Erasmus+, 2015).

Over 49 000 Kazakhstani students study abroad. In Russia, there are over 15 000, second to that is China with 10 000 students. Here in Kazakhstan, universities enrolled only 7 000 foreign citizens (Arguments and facts Kazakhstan, 2016). To increase the number of foreign students in Kazakhstan, the government takes measures to develop the attractiveness of Kazakhstani universities. In this direction, the key aspect is the language, which is understandable to all participants in the educational process. A language that is understandable to all makes it possible to provide educational services in a particular country. Throughout the world, internationalization is implemented through the English language. In Kazakhstan, the educational process is dominated by Russian and Kazakh language. To successfully integrate into the world educational space, the Kazakhstan government began to develop a triad of languages (Kazakh, Russian, and English). The preparation of multilingual staff is being carried out; programs with English training are being opened, in some Kazakhstani universities, training is conducted only in English (“Nazarbayev University”, KIMEP University, and Kazakh-British Technical University). In this area, the Roadmap for the development of a trilingual education for 2015-2020 implemented. The implementation of the Roadmap will allow developing academic mobility, international cooperation is more effective, and, consequently, will also expand the internationalization of education (Omirbayev, 2015). International students can receive education in English, Kazakh and Russian languages; it is an advantage for Kazakhstan universities to attract foreign students. Along with this, the government of Kazakhstan provides educational grants for foreign students, which includes housing and a monthly stipend. The main flow of students is from countries like: China, South Korea, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Mongolia, Ukraine, Romania, Kyrgyzstan, Egypt, and Belarus. Foreign citizens in their first year are trained in preparatory courses, after which they receive an education their bachelor, master and PhD programs at the university.

Internationalization of education is increasingly becoming a targeted policy on the part of the state, which focuses on solving national, political, social and economic problems. To promote the cooperation of international education, economic benefit becomes the goal for most

countries. The country's economic development becomes the impetus for the improvement of the national education system to make it attractive to foreign consumers. Therefore, once China started a path of internationalization of education. After the announcement of the policy of openness, the first step in the internationalization of the Chinese state focused on the export of students, so in 1978 the Chinese government decided to send three thousand people annually for training abroad (Shvedova, 2013). The second step was the attraction of foreign students, teachers and scholars to China. The third step was the opening of joint educational programs, universities and English-language programs and courses. Along with this, the key aspect of the internationalization of Chinese education was the Chinese centers spread throughout the world, where they teach Chinese language and culture. In terms of Kazakh language and cultural centers, Kazakhstan lags behind; foreign consumers mainly come to Kazakhstan to study Kazakh and Russian languages. And it should be noted that in connection with China's economic development, Chinese language is in demand, which allows for the successful distribution of Chinese centers around the world.

6. Conclusion

Internationalization leads to innovation promotion in the field of education, thus increasing the quality of education, academic mobility, strengthening the competitiveness of the students, thereby producing a high level of human capital. Despite all these efforts of Kazakhstan in the internationalization of education, Kazakhstan will have to do a lot of work to enter the top 30 most competitive countries of the world. To achieve this, it is necessary to overcome the barriers to the successful integration of Kazakhstan into the world educational space. Attraction of international students and scientists is one work, but providing them with a favorable and safe environment for the educational process is also an important aspect. Kazakhstan has to improve its infrastructure, increase or double its efforts in learning and skills acquisition of the English language, introduce the latest technologies, improve the quality of education and increase funding for equal internationalization throughout Kazakhstan. We live in a world of globalization, where there are intense competition and struggle. In order to be among the most competitive, all have to adapt to world standards. Kazakhstan therefore, to prepare in order not to lose its cultural or national identity in the face of internationalization of its higher education.

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