



TEACHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN KAZAKHSTAN

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KSZTAŁCENIE I DOSKONALENIE ZAWODOWE NAUCZYCIELI W KAZACHSTANIE

Słowa kluczowe: nauczyciel, edukacja, szkolenia, certyfikacja zawodowa

Streszczenie. W prezentowanym artykule skoncentrowano się na specyfice reformy w zakresie uzyskiwania kwalifikacji zawodowych, procesu certyfikacji i ewaluacji doskonalenia zawodowego w Kazachstanie. Dynamika zmian społecznych oraz pojawiające się nowe zjawiska, mające swoje odzwierciedlenie w zachowaniach dzieci i młodzieży w szkole, wymagają zmian w systemie kształcenia i doskonalenia zawodowego nauczycieli. Przemiany te mają umożliwić nauczycielom szybkie odczytywanie zachodzących zjawisk, rozumienie zachowań dzieci i młodzieży oraz adekwatne reagowanie na nie, aby zapewnić swoim uczniom edukację na najwyższym poziomie. Szczególnie ważny w procesie rekrutacji nauczycieli wydaje się nowy system certyfikowania kwalifikacji zawodowych, który pozwala wejść na rynek pracy najlepszym nauczycielom (tj. przygotowanym pod względem merytorycznym i praktycznym), gwarantującym lepszą jakość kształcenia uczniów.

Keywords: teacher, education, training, professional certification

Abstract. The paper focuses on the characteristics of reforms of teacher professional qualification, certification, and evaluation process in Kazakhstan. The dynamics of social transformation and new phenomena emerging, which are reflected in the behaviours of children and youth in schools, call for changes in teacher education and training systems. These changes should help teachers so that they can quickly recognize and understand the new phenomena and behaviours, and respond to them adequately to provide the highest quality education to their students. In teacher recruitment, the new certification system

seems to be of particular importance, as it allows to identify the best teachers (the best prepared in terms of theory and practice), which at in turn, will guarantee the best education.

Introduction

The future of modern civilization does not depend on the technological progress and economic growth only but, first of all, on the quality of education. Well-educated individuals are crucial when it comes to solving key social and economic problems for the good and the benefit of humanity. Concerned about the future, many countries have been acting towards reforming their education systems and programs, modernizing teaching process and introducing changes in teacher professional education because teachers are directly responsible for the realization of priority national and global education goals. Changes in the above-mentioned areas are particularly noticeable in the former Soviet states, including Kazakhstan. Education reforms are considered the key accelerator of the country's economic and socio-cultural development. The area of strategic reforms was identified in the State Programme of Education and Science Development 2020–2025.

Reforms of teacher profession are of particular importance (Ell et al., 2019) because it has been acknowledged that changes aiming at elevating the prestige of teaching are strictly connected with the quality of teachers' knowledge, skills, personal traits, their motivation and commitment to work – the qualities associated also with the social status of this profession. For this reason, the improvement of the quality of teaching is a strategic necessity for further economic and social development of the country (Bell, Stevenson, 2006; Rizvi, Lingard, 2010). The key element of this global task is education system where teachers with high level of professional and pedagogical competence are the main figures. During the implementation of education reforms, a range of both positive and negative tendencies can be observed.

One of the negative factors and trends is low remuneration which is discourages to work, decreases motivation and, in consequence, limits teachers' professional development and commitment to work. As a result, the social status, social security and prestige of teachers decreases. This leads to, among others, growing feminization of the profession, ageing of active staff, decreasing interest in teaching profession among high school graduates, large percentage of pedagogy students resigning from studies or changing their faculties, or pedagogy graduates looking for employment in well paid industry sectors rather than

in schools. Together with the growing number of children in school age, the insufficient number of prospective teachers will most likely contribute to the deficit of teaching staff and a decrease in the quality of education in Kazakhstan.

One of the positive tendencies are efforts made by academic units that train teachers, towards greater autonomy, introduction of new specializations and subject sought after in the society in the rapidly changing socio-economic conditions. Recently, a considerable work has been done to renew the standards for all the specializations, what resulted in diverse and multilevel academic curricula. In order to improve the quality of teacher training, new education technologies have been gradually introduced. A lot of attention is being paid to the renewal of education and methodological modules for all the subjects. An increased interest in humanistic education has been also noticeable. For example, in 2023, 25% of curricula were updated to introduce modern teaching methods and materials. Publications from educational conferences on school reform also reflect this trend. There has also been a noticeable increase in interest in the humanities; over the past two years, the number of students choosing humanities disciplines has risen by 15% (Reports from educational market research published by QS World University Rankings).

The paper focuses on the changes in education, training and professional promotion of teachers, introduced in Kazakhstan in 2019. The quality of teacher preparation determines the quality of education as well as the future, development and technological and civilizational progress. Thus, reforms and changes to teacher education are critical, as well as creation of a clear recruitment and promotion system and forms of further professional training and development.

Teacher education

Common expectations towards professionals with pedagogical background have changed in recent years. According to the Act on the status of teachers, adopted at the end of 2019, the 'Concept of Higher Pedagogical Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan' and the 'Concept of Continuous Training of New Generation of Teachers in Kazakhstan', thanks to the quality of education and their work, teachers will acquire a higher social status and higher remuneration.

Like in many other countries, the higher education system in Kazakhstan consists of several degrees:

- bachelor's degree (duration: usually 4 years). It is the first level of higher education. Students gain general or specialist education and the bachelor's degree. The graduates can begin to work in schools.
- Master's degree (duration: usually 2 years). Program dedicated to the bachelor's degree alumni. The program focuses more on specific specializations and fields. The graduates can begin to work in schools.

In Kazakhstan, vocational schools oriented towards providing basic vocational qualifications (grades 9–11 of high school) play an important role in preparing students to further professional training. In these schools, students obtain practical skills and knowledge from a given discipline or field. In addition to the theoretical information, at this stage, students also develop skills necessary to enter the labor market successfully. Graduates can begin professional activity according to qualifications obtained. Thus, students of pedagogical specializations can begin to work in educational institutions as middle level specialists and take part in the educational activity.

Teacher training pathways at higher education level in Kazakhstan vary depending on the type (level) of school they will work. Thus, there is a different training path for pre-school teachers (focus on the harmonious development of children aged 3 to 6 years, education at an early stage of development and methods of teaching through fun, stimulation of development), a different curriculum for teachers in grades 1–4 (teaching all subjects included in the early school program), and a different path for teachers at higher levels, grades 5–11 (teachers of specific subjects). The system of classification of teacher specializations in Kazakhstan (Resolution of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. No. 500 'On approval of the Classifier of specialties' of 2018, with amendments and additions of 22 June 2023) identifies the following profiles:

- 0112 Training of preschool teachers: a curriculum for those who plan to work as teachers in pre-school facilities.
- 0113 Training of teachers without subject specialization (teachers in special (correctional) boarding organization, additional education teachers): program for those who want to work in educational institutions, including complementary education.
- 0114 Training of teachers with subject specialization (pedagogy and methods of primary school education: primary education teacher, foreign language teacher in primary education, music teacher in preschool, primary and basic secondary education) curricula for those who plan to work

in pre-schools and primary schools in different specializations, including pre-school teaching, foreign language in pre-school and music preschool, primary and basic secondary schools).

Changes regarding the teaching profession and teachers are presented in these documents as prerequisites to develop a new vocational training system. As declared, the new generation of teachers are individuals who are spiritually and morally advanced, have the sense of civic responsibility, are innovative and creative, aware of environmental issues, reflective, committed to self-development and self-fulfillment, with high methodological, research, didactic, social, emotional, communication, information and other competencies necessary to work in the constantly changing school environment (Концепция..., 2023). During their training, teachers should develop an awareness of the value of education, gain excellent knowledge of their discipline (subject taught) and teaching methods, and possess knowledge and skills in psychology, pedagogy, modern pedagogical solutions and strategies used while working with students with diverse developmental needs. They should also be committed to developing their own potential, professional competence, personal predispositions and traits. These requirements are described in details in the 'Concept of higher pedagogical education in the Republic of Kazakhstan' and the 'Concept of continuous training of new generation of teachers in the Republic of Kazakhstan'. Changes in vocational training are the result of transformations observed and professional challenges (e.g. risky behaviors exhibited by students, addictions, access to modern technologies and tools etc.) faced by teachers on a daily basis. That is why their training has been oriented and adapted to the specific nature of their work and the needs of certain educational institutions, educational service providers, while ensuring the freedom of choice of individual training path (Концепция..., 2023). The system is to be consistent with the assumptions regarding its multilevel character and ensure vertical openness and horizontal alternatives of the training path (focus on the dynamics, flexibility, reliability, high quality and versatility of teacher development).

Teacher education still remains a hybrid system where old standards are gradually replaced by new ones based on the international experience, research and innovations in prospective teacher training. Pedagogical universities in Kazakhstan offer programs based on complex modules that encompass knowledge and skills in pedagogy and psychology (diagnostics, prevention) as well as effective teaching methods, which efficiently utilize the time students spend in class (focus, structured order during lessons). Examples of such modules include:

1) Modules in Pedagogy and Psychology:

- Diagnostics and Prevention: These programs focus on identifying and preventing developmental and educational issues among students. Within these modules, students learn techniques for diagnosing students' difficulties and methods for preventing behavioral and educational problems.
- Child Development Psychology: These courses cover the theory and practice related to the stages of child development and the impact of these stages on the teaching and learning process.

2) Effective Teaching Methods:

- Active Learning Methodology: These programs introduce techniques such as discovery-based teaching, group work, and project-based teaching methods that increase student engagement and improve teaching effectiveness.
- Classroom Management and Lesson Organization: Students learn methods for effective time management and organization of classroom space, which promotes better student focus and optimal use of lesson time.

These modules are adapted to modern educational standards and international experiences, allowing for the integration of global trends in teacher education with local educational needs. As a result, teacher training in Kazakhstan improves in quality and is better prepared to address the challenges of the contemporary educational environment (Resolution of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan...).

Effective vocational internships integrate theory and practice, facilitate development of interpersonal skills, ability to cope in a dynamic school environment and adjust teaching methods to individual needs of students. Pedagogy students can take part in classes, observe experienced teachers and participate actively in the teaching process. Experience gained during vocational internships is crucial for the development of their teaching competencies. As they interact with students, prospective teachers learn to adapt their methodology to different age groups and skill levels. Effective vocational internships integrate theory and practice, facilitate development of interpersonal skills, ability to cope in a dynamic school environment and adjust teaching methods to individual needs of students.

As an example, consider the practical training program and methodological recommendations of one of Kazakhstan's universities in the field of pedagogy

and methods of teaching early grades. During their education, students in pedagogical programs, according to state mandatory educational standards, undertake various types of professional internships: teaching internships, pedagogical internships, and production internships (Program and Methodological Recommendations of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University).

The assignment of students to all types of internships is based on a directive from the university head, which specifies the timing of the internships, the internship base, and the internship supervisor. Four types of internships can be distinguished: two teaching internships (continuous from classes) of 30 hours each, lasting 15 weeks in the first and second semesters, a pedagogical internship in the sixth semester lasting 90 hours over 3 weeks. The aim of the pedagogical internship is to consolidate and deepen knowledge in general sciences, cultural studies, psychological-pedagogical, methodological, and specialized fields, as well as to develop pedagogical skills, abilities, and competencies based on theoretical knowledge. The pedagogical internship aims to integrate general scientific, didactic, methodological, subject-specific, and psychological-pedagogical knowledge. The production internship in the eighth semester lasts 300 hours over 10 weeks. The aim of the production internship is to consolidate key competencies, acquire practical skills, and gain experience in the chosen specialty.

The bases for the production internship are organizations corresponding to the training profile (or related organizations). According to this program, upon completion of the internships, students should:

1) knowledge:

- basic organizational and managerial functions of school operation (regulatory documents; internal school regulations; sanitary-hygienic conditions, etc.);
- main directions and content of the educational work of the school's pedagogical team;
- the system of planning educational work for the homeroom teacher (primary school teacher);
- methods and forms of organizing extracurricular activities for students;
- basic directions of school–family collaboration;
- the professional profile of a teacher and the specifics of their work in primary grades;
- features of the psychophysical development of early school-age students (Program and Methodological Recommendations of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University);

2) skills:

- observation and analysis of the teacher's educational and developmental work in the classroom, their professional qualifications;
- development of an individual work plan;
- planning educational work with the class;
- selection and organization of effective forms of extracurricular activities considering the psychophysical characteristics of children;
- conducting diagnostics of the developmental level of early school-age students;
- development of a psychological-pedagogical profile of the student;
- independent analysis of the work performed.

The university should enter into appropriate agreements with the internship bases according to the standard internship organization agreement approved by the relevant education authority. This also applies to the selection of schools where the internships take place (Program and Methodological Recommendations of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University).

Teaching studies with curricula based on pedagogy are not considered easy. Many candidates fail to complete the bachelor's program as they are not able to meet the requirements in terms of knowledge and skills. In addition, the interest in teaching studies has been decreasing due to poor economic situation of teachers. Thus, in order to stimulate the attractiveness of teaching and pedagogical professions, the state regularly increases the scholarships for the prospective teachers. As a result, students of pedagogical programs receive higher scholarships than students of other programs and specializations.

The selection process for teacher training programs in Kazakhstan is crucial for ensuring that the most well-prepared candidates enter the teaching profession. Candidates are evaluated based on several criteria:

- entrance exams: candidates undergo exams covering general and specialized subjects, which aim to assess their academic potential and pedagogical skills.
- high school grades: results from high school final exams and grades in subjects related to pedagogy and psychology are considered in the selection process.
- interviews: some universities conduct interviews to assess candidates' motivation and ability to work in a diverse school environment.

Scholarships for Teacher Training Students are awarded to enhance the attractiveness of the teaching profession. Types of Scholarships:

- specialized scholarships: exclusively for students in pedagogical programs, awarded at higher amounts than scholarships for students in other fields.
- motivational scholarships: awarded to students who achieve high academic results and actively participate in social activities.

The increase in scholarships has contributed to a rise in applications for pedagogical programs. This improvement has enhanced students' financial situations and increased the attractiveness of teaching professions, which may positively impact the quality of education in Kazakhstan.

Certification of teacher professional qualifications

Teacher certification process plays the key role in ensuring the high quality of education in Kazakhstan. In order to become a certified teacher, students must meet certain conditions. They include both theoretical and practical aspects to ensure that prospective educators have knowledge and skills necessary for effective teaching. The key element of the certification process are theoretical exams which verify the knowledge in pedagogy, psychology and other areas related to teaching. The theoretical tests are the reference point for the evaluation of the theoretical preparation of teachers. The candidates also have to pass practical exams, during which their ability to apply the theory in practice is verified. They have to demonstrate their skills in leading classes, dealing with problems in the class and adjusting their methods to students' individual needs. The teacher certification process has its challenges. The candidates often have to spend extra time on studying, preparing to the tests or improving their skills. Thus, in order to be able to apply for work in schools or kindergartens, prospective teachers have to complete the certification procedure (e.g. pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education teacher).

The theoretical and practical exams are organized by appropriate educational institutions or external commissions approved by the Ministry of Education. The exams are conducted by special ministerial or departmental committees, rather than by the universities themselves. These committees are responsible for ensuring the consistency and reliability of the certification process.

The Certification Committee is composed of teachers with at least 10 years of experience and qualifications such as 'Expert Teacher,' 'Research Teacher,' or 'Master Teacher'; methodologists from methodological centers, professional development institutions for teachers; representatives from social, non-governmental, and union organizations; specialists from educational

management bodies and their subordinate units. Teachers undergoing certification during the committee's term cannot be members of the committee. The committee's term lasts one year from the date of its approval. The committee consists of an odd number of members (at least seven). The chairperson of the committee is elected from among its members. Committee members participate in meetings without the right to delegate. The committee secretary prepares materials and documents necessary for the meetings, drafts and signs the minutes. The secretary is not a committee member (Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan of January 27, 2016. No. 83. 'On the approval of the rules and conditions for teacher certification').

The certification process applies to both graduating students and graduates seeking full qualifications. Certification is required for both new hires and current teachers and directors.

Teachers undergo this process every five years, while directors and their deputies do so every three years. The certification consists of the following stages:

1) teachers:

- National Qualification Tests (NQT): The first stage of certification for teachers. These tests are conducted online and require a specific number of points, varying by position, qualifications, and teaching discipline. If the threshold is not met, the tests can be retaken for a fee.
- Granting or Confirming Qualifications: After passing the theoretical and practical tests, teachers receive confirmation of their qualifications.

2) directors and their deputies:

- Qualification Assessment: Includes the evaluation of achievements and skills.
- Results Summary: Collection and analysis of qualification assessment results.
- NQT: Directors also undergo national tests similar to teachers but are subject to an additional evaluation stage.

NQT is the first stage for both school directors and teachers, conducted online. A specific number of points is required depending on the position, qualifications, and teaching discipline. If the threshold is not reached, the tests can be retaken for a fee. The second stage is for those who pass the test. NQT results are valid for one year, during which one can retake the test or proceed to another stage.

Teaching certification does not mean the end of professional development. Continuation of training is crucial to maintain the high quality of teaching. Vocational

courses, seminars and participation in international educational programs are the important elements of certified teachers' development. The act specifying the rules and procedures for teacher certification is called the Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan of January 27, 2016. No. 83. 'On the approval of the rules and conditions for teacher certification.'

Vocational training during teacher development, evaluation and certification

The continuous professional development of certified teachers plays a crucial role in maintaining high-quality education through regular updates of knowledge and the development of new skills necessary for teaching in modern schools. One of the most common forms of professional development is professional courses. Teachers participate in training on modern teaching methods, educational technologies, and innovations. These trainings are state-funded, ensuring that teachers have access to current knowledge without incurring costs related to attending the courses.

Another effective training tool is seminars and workshops, which are typically free and organized at the regional level or by specific schools. They provide an interactive exchange of experiences, mutual learning based on practical experience, and exploration of specific, significant educational phenomena. Teachers can also take advantage of dedicated days off (training leave) to fully focus on their professional development.

In some cases, participation in certain forms of professional development may be mandatory, especially for teachers seeking higher qualifications or promotions. There is a points system that requires teachers to complete a certain number of training hours within a given year, which is a condition for career continuation or obtaining additional benefits. Participation in development programs often contributes to gaining points for periodic evaluations, which can impact career advancement and salary increases.

Additionally, teachers can further their knowledge and skills through post-graduate studies, which offer more advanced curricula than master's programs. The Kazakhstani government provides financial support for this purpose in the form of scholarships or grants, covering part or all of the study costs. These programs are typically free or partially funded for participants.

Significant emphasis is also placed on collaboration with international educational organizations, enabling teachers to participate in international professional

training programs. Exchange programs, international conferences, and other initiatives allow teachers to broaden their horizons, acquire new skills, and gain knowledge from the world's leading specialists.

Support for teachers in their professional development is organized at both the national and regional levels. The Ministry of Education develops strategies and guidelines for teacher development, while training implementation often occurs at the regional level (Kazakhstan State Education Development Programs 2020–2025).

To ensure the effectiveness of professional development programs, the government has a monitoring and evaluation system. This system relies on regular surveys and analyses of training quality, evaluation of teachers after completing courses, and long-term tracking of the effects of their participation in programs. A points mechanism has also been introduced, which affects periodic evaluations and teacher promotions. Collaboration with international organizations helps to implement best practices in monitoring and evaluation (State Education Development Program 2020–2025).

The responsibility for continuous improvement, aiming at professional excellence, expanding and completing knowledge, and creative development is imposed on teachers in the Act on Education, and verified at least once in five years (tests). At the same time, Article 15 of the Act guarantees teachers days off work to spent on training – four months at least once in five years. At present, teacher professional trainings are held by the following organizations:

- The National Center for Advances Studies (ORLEU) (<https://orleu-edu.kz/>),
- The Center of Excellence (<https://cpm.kz/ru/>),
- ‘Bolashaq’, the Center for International Programs (<https://bolashak.gov.kz/ru/o-kompanii>).

ORLEU is a leading center (hub) focusing on the professional development of teachers, adult education, applied studies, and the promotion of modern educational practices in Kazakhstan. It was established by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The center is funded by the state budget, which means it is directly accountable to the Ministry. ORLEU plays a key role in implementing the country's educational strategies, concentrating on enhancing teachers' skills in modern teaching methods and educational technologies. Its mission is to provide high-quality continuous professional development for teachers to achieve high levels of student academic achievement and holistic development, as well as ongoing skill development necessary for success in life (ORLEU Strategic Plan). The center has branches in 20 cities and regions across Kazakhstan, allowing it to be close to every teacher and provide professional support tailored to regional

contexts. The center employs a diverse team of specialists, including experienced teachers, researchers, pedagogues, and educational experts, who possess extensive knowledge of innovative pedagogical practices and skills to adapt training programs to the needs of teachers in various regions.

The Center of Excellence is a leading institution in the teacher training system in the Republic of Kazakhstan. It positions itself as a leader in professional teacher development and has an innovative portfolio of educational programs and projects. The Center has 15 branches functioning in every region of the country. The main areas of the Center's activity are:

- development of qualification improvement programs,
- trainer's training,
- trainings and postgraduate support for teachers,
- research activity,
- publishing textbooks and methodological literature.

The main goal of the International Programs Center is to implement comprehensive actions related to international programs for teacher preparation, re-training, and training abroad, including the international 'Bolashak' Presidential Scholarship of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The International Programs Center manages the 'Bolashak' scholarship program, research internships, and inter-governmental grants. It is responsible for receiving documents and conducting the selection process.

The scholarships and programs managed by the Center are dedicated to both teachers and researchers, with a diverse nature. The 'Bolashak' scholarship programs cover both scientific and methodological/didactic aspects, allowing participants to acquire knowledge and skills in modern teaching methods, educational innovations, and scientific research. This enables both teachers and researchers to develop their competencies broadly, addressing needs in both the educational and research fields.

An important element of preparation of the prospective teachers is the creation of conditions favoring effective development of professional competencies, which include the ability to reflect on and understand the contemporary education priorities. The following aspects that determine the knowledge and skills required for successful and solid preparation of teachers should be improved:

- introduction of innovative teaching methods,
- integration of the 12-year model of secondary education and higher education,
- introduction of trilingual teaching in schools,

- criterion-based student assessment,
- development of competence-based model of modern teacher,
- reinforcement of partnerships between schools and universities,
- inclusivity of education,
- education of future pedagogues towards citizenship, humanism, responsibility, and tolerance,
- professional teacher competencies in schools with low number of students,
- continuous development (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of July 27, 2007. No. 319-III. 'On Education' with amendments and additions as of September 10, 2023).

Conclusions

Educational reforms in Kazakhstan, especially those connected with teaching profession, are the key component of accelerating the economic and socio-cultural development of the country. Introduction of new education standards, autonomy for academic entities, new teaching technologies, and changes in the certification system aim at improving the quality of education and elevating the teachers' status. It should be pointed out that teacher education system consists of several stages, from bachelor's degree to doctoral studies and the doctor's degree. In this process, vocational schools play an important role as they prepare different specialists, including prospective teachers, by equipping them in practical skills necessary to function successfully in the labor market.

To ensure the best quality education, the qualification certification system has been also introduced, including theoretical tests and practical exams, as well as regular qualification assessment. After receiving the teacher certificate, continuation of training is crucial to maintain the high quality of teaching. The same is true for professional development through participation in trainings, seminars, workshops, and postgraduate courses. Evaluation of achievements, work performance, and professional development of teachers, both by their supervisors and by themselves, is the key tool to identify the areas that need further improvement and create professional development plans.

The goal of the changes is to educate and prepare modern teaching staff, competent in methodological didactical, psychological, pedagogical, and socio-emotional domains. By introducing the reforms, Kazakhstan aims at ensuring high quality education, which will contribute to the further development of the country in the dynamic, progressive, modern world.

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