

INTERNATIONALIZATION AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract. After gaining independence Central Asian countries has formed its own path to the modernization of the higher education system. Scholars, in general, agree that during the Soviet Union, the Central Asian countries and Kazakhstan had a successful education system as measured by quantitative indicators, such as literacy, primary and secondary education for school-age children, and scientific research and part of this heritage has been preserved to the present day. However, the previous education system set the state the task of building new education systems – the internationalization of higher education in these countries since the collapse of the Soviet Union coincided with the rise of globalization. Researchers, theorists and practitioners of the educational sphere, government agencies and civil society are currently studying these issues. Many Governments are beginning to develop national internationalization strategies. The following issues considered in the article: What are the interpretations of the concept of internationalization, what is the current situation in the educational processes in Kazakhstan and have the instruments of internationalization led to an improvement in the quality of higher education in Kazakhstan under consideration international scholarship program “Bolashak”? In the article, primary sources, such as national and international statistics, official information of the Ministry of science and higher education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, news resources are used as well as secondary sources, such as analytics of news agencies and analytical centers. We argue that a well-thought-out and implemented strategy of internationalization of the education system will have an impact not only on increasing the competitiveness of Kazakhstan’s graduates in the global labor market but also on the competitiveness of the economy and Bolashak program achieved some degree of success.

Keywords: internationalization, higher education system, development, improvement, university, “Bolashak” program, Kazakhstan, educational sphere

Basic provisions

The presented article is based on a literary review of the work of various authors to reveal the concept of internationalization in the system of higher education. The present situation in the educational process of Kazakhstan, in terms of internationalization, is described, and the process of implementing internationalization in Kazakhstan is described using the example of the international scholarship program “Bolashak”.

Introduction

Education plays an important role in the economy of developed countries, and it is the main sector that shapes the future of a nation. The goals and priorities of strategic programs in the field of education are being constantly updated. At the same

time, countries focus their efforts on solving the most important tasks, depending on the level of current development and available opportunities. Within the framework of these areas, most countries identify the following priorities: equalizing the opportunities of students regardless of the socio-economic status of the family; ensuring that the skills of graduates meet the requirements of the economy; professional development and high status of teachers; involvement of employers in training; evaluation of the education system and educational organizations; building an effective management structure; building communications with stakeholders; efficient use of financial resources.

Kazakhstan, as a member of the world community, aims to improve the quality of education as an integral and necessary part of the modernization and creation of a knowledge-intensive economy. The processes of modernization of higher education in the world and Kazakhstan since the middle of the last century, have become permanent. The main goal of the State Program for the Development of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025 is to increase the global competitiveness of Kazakhstan's education and science and training of the individual based on universal values, as well as increasing the contribution of science to the socio-economic development of the country [1]. In this development program, it is noted that it is necessary to take measures to further develop the education and science system by the best domestic and international practices. For example, according to the review of policies of OECD member countries and partners, the focus of modern public policy in education is concentrated in six areas: (1) equality and quality, (2) preparing students for the future, (3) improving educational institutions, (4) assessment system, (5) management and (6) financing [1]. As the main result of this program, Kazakhstan has been gradually implementing measures to improve the quality of education and science over the years.

One of the ways to improve the quality of education is the internationalization of education, which represents the process of integrating various international aspects into the research, teaching, and administrative activities of universities. In the context of globalization, universities cannot ignore internationalization as a global development trend that determines the competitiveness of the educational system.

Description of materials and methods

This article will address the following research questions: What does internationalization mean in the higher education system? What is the current situation in the internationalization of education in Kazakhstan? Do the instruments of internationalization lead to an improvement in the quality of higher education in Kazakhstan? These questions will be answered by considering the creation and realization processes of the International scholarship program “Bolashak”. The research questions will be answered by analysing the primary and secondary data and applying the descriptive research method.

The paper is organized as follows: First, it provides the theoretical background to the concept of internationalization of the higher education system. Second,

examines the current situation of the higher education system in Kazakhstan in the context of internationalization, such as academic mobility, programs, and projects within international cooperation, examines the internationalization tool by using the example of the International scholarship program “Bolashak”, which was created and implemented in Kazakhstan to train talented young people to apply them later in the creative sectors of the economy. The conclusion summarizes the main thoughts obtained during the study.

Results

What is meant by the internationalization of the higher education system? The internationalization of the higher education system includes not only economic benefits for the country but also the acquisition of knowledge through the expansion and accessibility of curricula with international content, international academic mobility, international exchanges of teachers and students, and various programs and projects within various forms of international cooperation.

The success of the implementation of internationalization in countries depends on many factors: the geographical location of the country, the level of economic development, the national system of higher education, and the dominant language of instruction. In this regard, internationalization requires the development of its national strategy of higher education, considering world experience.

Scholars offer different interpretations of the concept of internationalization. In 1972, Harari as cited in Seidel included three main elements in the concept of internationalization: 1) the presence of an international component in the content of curricula and programs; 2) international mobility of students and teaching staff; 3) the availability of technical cooperation and mutual assistance programs. In the 1990s, additions appeared to the definition of the term as “the process of integrating the international aspect in higher education”, and “strengthening the international component in higher education” [2, p. 289].

Filippov V. understands internationalization as “all types and forms of activities carried out by individual countries and their higher educational institutions, which provide for international interaction at the level of education systems, educational organizations or individuals” [3, p. 204]. According to Filippov V., the internationalization of education is one of the factors in ensuring international educational cooperation, the driving force of which is the promotion of the national interests of the interacting parties and increasing competition in the global education market [3, p. 204]. He further states that internationalization is not a goal for universities, but the need to respond to the challenges of globalization. The objectivity of the internationalization of education is manifested in the form of “certain policies and programs of governments, academic systems and educational institutions that aim to resist globalization or use its opportunities” [3, p. 204].

Scholars identify the main levels of internationalization. One of these studies presents the following levels of internationalization. Supranational levels: global, regional, national, sectoral, and institutional. Intra-institutional levels: faculty/department level and individual level [4]. Thus, according to scholars, internationalization is a complex process that has arisen in the context of

globalization, which gives higher education the character of an international and intercultural dimension. Internationalization is also manageable; the integration of education systems becomes a purposeful process of embedding national higher education systems into the global educational environment. The principle of internationalization, in their opinion, is not competition, but international cooperation.

Among the associations of universities in the European internationalization of higher education, the European Association of Universities and the Association of Academic Cooperation are important. The European University Association (EUA) supports higher education institutions in more than 46 countries. The members are European universities involved in teaching and research, national associations of rectors, and other organizations in the field of higher education [5].

The Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) is an association of national organizations in Europe and the world that support internationalization in their higher education systems. ACA is an expert center created to conduct research and evaluation, as well as seminars and conferences to disseminate information about new developments in European and global higher education [5].

Internationalization in higher education is also understood as giving an international dimension to the education process, for example, when universities offer their educational services in countries where there are no opportunities to meet the demand for higher education. The exporters of educational services are mainly universities in the USA, Europe, and Australia. The importers are the countries of Africa, Asia, and some European countries, that is, regions that cannot provide the necessary level of educational services. The actors of internationalization are universities, state organizations, and international and regional organizations. States finance their universities based on the results of their activities, so this area is not expensive. This area is becoming a profitable sector of the economy.

Discussion

Conducted by the Scientific Research Center “Youth” the results of a sociological study showed that the level of satisfaction of young people with their education remained at the same level at 79.5% in 2022 compared to the previous year (2021, 79.3%) as the sum of the answer options “fully satisfied” and “rather satisfied”. The respondents' answers depending on the level of education were distributed as follows: at three levels (grades, colleges, and higher), every fifth respondent (20%) expressed his dissatisfaction (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of answers to the question “Are you satisfied with the quality of the education you have received or are receiving (one answer)?”, by the level of education, %

| Answer options | Incomplete secondary, 9 th -grade school | Secondary, 11 th -grade school | Vocational, secondary specialized (college) | Unfinished higher education, just studying at a university | Higher education, graduated from a university | Postgraduate education (Master's degree, Candidate/D doctor of Science, PhD) |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|--|---|--|
| Completely satisfied | 31,1 | 26,9 | 30,1 | 33,9 | 36,9 | 36,0 |
| Rather satisfied | 49,1 | 48,1 | 47,6 | 50,0 | 44,0 | 44,0 |
| Rather not satisfied | 13,9 | 18,4 | 17,1 | 12,5 | 13,8 | 20,0 |
| Completely dissatisfied | 3,8 | 2,5 | 3,1 | 2,2 | 2,2 | 0,0 |
| I find it difficult to answer | 2,1 | 4,1 | 2,0 | 1,3 | 3,1 | 0,0 |

The data are taken from the sociological study "Youth of Kazakhstan", 2022

According to respondents, the most pressing issue in the university system is the level of tuition fees (18.1%). In addition, there are such problems as the size of student scholarships (9.8%) and employment opportunities after graduation (9.5%). Among the positively assessed aspects of higher education is also the qualification of teaching staff (15.2%).

The rating of various aspects of higher education on the quality scale, according to the respondents' estimates, is presented in Table No. 2.

Table 2. Higher education quality scale (according to respondents' estimates)

| Answer options | % |
|---|------|
| Qualification of teachers at the university | 52,6 |
| Number and distribution of state educational grants | 49,2 |
| The opportunity to find a job in the specialty | 48,1 |
| Anti-corruption measures in the education system | 46,3 |
| The amount of student scholarships | 46,1 |
| The level of tuition fees | 41,8 |

Quality scale: 81-100 – Excellent, 61-80 – good, 41-60 – satisfactory, 21-40 – unsatisfactory, 0-20 – very bad.

The calculation of quantitative data showed that the aspects of university education are evaluated by respondents mainly by 3 (satisfactory). At the same time, the highest marks (an indicator above 50%) were set for one position: the qualification of teachers. The number and distribution of state educational grants and the opportunity to find a job in the specialty occupy the second block of assessments (48-50 points). The third block of assessments (below 48 points) is anti-corruption measures in the education system, the number of scholarships for students, and the level of tuition fees.

These are excerpts from the annual study "Youth of Kazakhstan", which is conducted by the Scientific Research Center "Youth". The results show how students rated the quality of education in Kazakhstan as a whole. The survey was

conducted in 2022 among youth aged 14-28 years from all regions of the country. A representative sample was 2000 respondents [6].

Currently, the Republic of Kazakhstan is participating in implementing numerous international agreements, programs, and projects. Kazakhstan is a member of the Bologna Follow-Up Group, and an advisory member of 8 international organizations (Council of Europe, UNESCO, European Association of Universities (EUA), European Association of Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE), European Union of Students (ESU), European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Education International and BUSINESS EUROPE) [7]. In 2010, Kazakhstan became a member of the European Higher Education Area as the first Central Asian state recognized as a full member [8].

In 1999, the declaration "European Higher Education Area" was adopted in Bologna, which defined the main goals for the harmonization of national educational systems of higher education in European countries. Document launched the Bologna process. Currently, 48 countries have joined the Bologna Process. Participation in the Bologna Process provides opportunities for cooperation in ensuring the quality of education (assessment methods, integrated training courses, and curricula), and mobility of students, teachers, and researchers [8].

According to the data of the Center for the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility, 6 650 international agreements of universities of Kazakhstan with foreign partners are currently being implemented in the country. The main purpose of the agreements is the exchange of students, the development of joint research projects, and scientific and methodological activities. Every year the number of contracts is increasing, 5960 projects were realized in 2021 [8].

There are branches of 5 foreign universities in the country, including 4 universities of the Russian Federation and 1 from the UK. 46 representative offices, branches, offices, and centers of 15 universities of Kazakhstan are in 19 countries of the world. 9 representative offices/centers of foreign universities operate based on 10 universities of Kazakhstan [8].

According to the data of the Center for the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility, 81 universities in Kazakhstan participate in 363 international projects. The largest number of projects implemented by universities with countries such as Russia (47), Germany (38), USA (23), Italy (13), China (15), and Great Britain (13). Kazakh universities have expanded participation in international projects with foreign organizations and partner universities compared to the last year by 33.4% [8].

In 1993, the former President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbayev announced the creation of the International scholarship program "Bolashak". In 1994, the first 187 holders of the international scholarship went to study abroad. In 2005, a program administrator JSC "Center for International Programs – Bolashak" (further – Center for International Programs) was created. The main goal of the administrator was to ensure an objective selection of fellows, as well as monitor the process of their education and employment.

Strict requirements were introduced for the return of funds for training, in case of expulsion of a student or his desire not to return to the country. For this purpose, the conditions are legally provided for the mandatory return of the program

participants and further work for five years in the sector from which the specialist left. A graduate of the program who has fulfilled his obligations is not obliged to return the funds spent on his training. The guarantee of return is the obligation of the scholarship holder to provide a deposit that would cover the costs of training. Due to the high cost of studying at the best universities in the world, it is possible to act as a pledger of the parents (relatives) of the scholarship holder. If the value of the property does not cover the tuition costs, the scholarship holder can attract a co-guarantor. Such a mechanism for ensuring the return of fellows to their homeland has proved effective: there are only isolated cases of non-returnees.

The list of countries of study has been expanded from 13 to 33 (Western universities, universities in China, South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, and Singapore). During the same period, the number of scholarships provided significantly increased [9]. Over the years of implementation, changes were made in the program according to the priority areas of the economy to provide in-demand personnel. Thus, such categories as graduates of rural schools, civil servants, and scientific and pedagogical workers were added. In 2011, the principle of training under a tripartite agreement was introduced: scholarship – employer – Bolashak program. This agreement guarantees the scholarship holder to return to his former place of work after graduation.

Also, due to the inexpediency, bachelor's degree training was canceled. Instead, opportunities have expanded for postgraduate-level specialists such as master's degree and doctoral studies, as well as specialists for scientific and industrial internships in leading companies and universities around the world. The program participants studied at 200 leading universities in 35 countries, and 44% of them graduated from universities in the UK and Ireland, 26% – in the USA and Canada, 13.7% – in Europe, 8.2% – in Asia, and 8.1% – in Russian Federation. In the context of specialties, the distribution is as follows: humanities – 53%, engineering - 38%, medical – 7.3% [10].

There are shortcomings in the program. For example, there is a huge debt of students who violated contractual conditions which is about 6% of the total number of fellows. These are not only financial returns, but also lost time for training relevant specialists in the necessary sectors of the economy. In addition, graduates who have returned after training, detaching themselves from their former place of work specified in the tripartite agreement, are trying to find work in large cities. This reduces the number of specialists in the regions. Experts also agree that there is no significant effect and benefit for the country from the activities of those who have studied under the program.

Currently, discussions about the effectiveness of the program have resumed. Recently, one of the deputies of the Majilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan again raised this problem. Indeed, this topic is relevant and problematic. The problem is that upon arrival, graduates who have completed their studies abroad find themselves unclaimed in the labor market. Few can boast of their achievements. By analyzing the Center for International Programs' data, the graduates are distributed as follows: 47.2% – quasi-public sector; 12% – government agencies; 32% – private companies; 6.9% – foreign companies; 0.9% – public associations;

0.1% - diplomatic and international organizations [10]. That is, the above-mentioned areas of activity are not those areas that can be in demand and can become the engine of the economy. Also, the reason for the low efficiency of the program is the lack of the economy for which specialists were trained in leading universities of the world. Until real reforms in the economy begin, there will be no effect, since quantity, not quality, wins so far. Graduates who have graduated dissolve into the general mass and, even if they wish, do not have the opportunity to change anything in the system that has been established for centuries.

The idea of the ex-president and the creation of the Program for talented youth would have been an undoubted success in the further development of the country, carrying out the necessary economic transformations in the country, if the implementation of the program would have been a little different. Firstly, if the program trained "point" specialists for the field in which it would be in demand. Secondly, if the graduated specialists would find their application in the education system to raise, for example, school education, the mastery of the English language by Kazakhs. Also in higher education, the graduates would teach in the IT sphere, etc. [9]. Perhaps during the periods of the program's existence, there would already have been specialists in the country who were attached to the format of modern foreign-Western or Asian education, trained in new knowledge and skills necessary for competitiveness in the labor market. This approach was considered only in one area of education, which affects all areas of the economy, forming approaches to study and work within the framework of internationalization.

Conclusion

Currently, internationalization in the educational sphere is becoming a trend in the world - an important component of the educational policy of countries. There are still discussions among scientists on the definition of the term "internationalization", which have different meanings depending on the country. Many agree that internationalization is the introduction of unified intercultural approaches in the educational process, focused on the formation of highly qualified human resources to strengthen countries' domestic and international competitiveness.

Experts highlight the following advantages of internationalization in the field of education: the introduction of international standards for the quality of education, unified values and priorities supported by intercultural competencies, universalization of knowledge, accessibility of higher education, implementation of international educational programs and projects, expansion and strengthening of international cooperation.

A well-thought-out and implemented strategy of internationalization of the education system will have an impact not only on increasing the competitiveness of Kazakhstan's graduates in the global labor market but also on the competitiveness of the economy. Nowadays, many countries are investing heavily in programs to support the education of their citizens abroad. For example, at the initial stage of Kazakhstan's development, internationalization in the country was implemented through the establishment of the International scholarship program "Bolashak". The goals of such state measures are associated with the formation of many well-trained

specialists with international-level competencies. State support for education is provided mainly in priority areas of the country's development and covers master's and doctoral studies, and research internships. Thus, internationalization, as connecting the international, educational, and economic spheres, is a priority direction of development of any state.

In general, the development of internationalization in the educational sphere in the country is implemented in tandem with global trends. The main directions of internationalization in higher educational institutions of the country are implemented according to the program-target principle. The development programs of higher educational institutions include a section on the development of international cooperation or internationalization (joint programs and projects with foreign universities, an increase in the number of students and teachers recruited, academic mobility of students and teachers, and others). Quantitative and qualitative indicators of internationalization measures depend on financial, material, and technical resources, as well as the human resources of higher educational institutions. At the same time, to obtain socio-economic benefits from internationalization, it is necessary to make this process transparent and understandable.

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ИНТЕРНАЦИОНАЛДАНДЫРУ ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ ЖОҒАРЫ БІЛІМ БЕРУ ЖҮЙЕСІН ЖЕТІЛДІРУ ҚҰРАЛЫ РЕТІНДЕ

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Аңдатпа. Тәуелсіздік алғаннан кейін Орталық Азия елдері жоғары білім беру жүйесін жаңғыртудың өзіндік жолын қалыптастырды. Ғалымдар, жалпы алғанда, Кеңес Одағы кезінде Орталық Азия елдерінде және Қазақстанда сауаттылық, мектеп жасындағы балаларға арналған Бастауыш және орта білім беру, сондай-ақ ғылыми зерттеулер сияқты сандық көрсеткіштермен өлшенетін табысты білім беру жүйесі болғандығымен келіседі және бұл мұраның бір бөлігі бүгінгі күнге дейін сақталған. Алайда, бұрынғы білім беру жүйесі мемлекет алдына жаңа білім беру жүйелерін құру міндетін қойды – Кеңес Одағы ыдырағаннан кейін осы елдерде жоғары білім беруді интернационалдандыру жаһандандырудың өсуімен сәйкес келді. Қазіргі уақытта зерттеушілер, білім беру саласының теоретиктері мен практиктері, мемлекеттік органдар мен азаматтық қоғам осы мәселелерді зерттеп жатыр. Көптеген үкіметтер ұлттық интернационалдандыру стратегияларын жасай бастайды. Мақалада мынадай сұрақтар қарастырылады: интернационалдандыру ұғымының түсіндірмелері қандай, Қазақстанның білім беру үдерістеріндегі ағымдағы жағдай қандай және интернационалдандыру құралдары қарастырылып отырған «Болашақ» халықаралық стипендиялық бағдарламасы шеңберінде Қазақстанда жоғары білім беру сапасын жақсартуға әкелді ме? Мақалада ұлттық және халықаралық статистика, Қазақстан

Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігінің ресми ақпараты, жаңалықтар ресурстары, сондай-ақ ақпараттық агенттіктер менталдау орталықтарының талдауы сияқты қайталама көздер сияқты бастапқы дереккөздер пайдаланылды. Біз білім беру жүйесін интернационалдандырудың жақсы ойластырылған және іске асырылып жатқан стратегиясы қазақстандық түлектердің әлемдік еңбек нарығындағы бәсекеге қабілеттілігін арттыруға ғана емес, сонымен қатар экономиканың бәсекеге қабілеттілігіне де әсер ететінін және «Болашақ» бағдарламасы белгілі бір табысқа жеткенін растаймыз.

Тірек сөздер: интернационалдандыру, жоғары білім беру жүйесі, даму, жетілдіру, университет, «Болашақ» бағдарламасы, Қазақстан, білім беру саласы

ИНТЕРНАЦИОНАЛИЗАЦИЯ КАК ИНСТРУМЕНТ СОВЕРШЕНСТВОВАНИЯ СИСТЕМЫ ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ

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Аннотация. После обретения независимости страны Центральной Азии сформировали свой собственный путь к модернизации системы высшего образования. Ученые, в целом, сходятся во мнении, что во времена Советского Союза в странах Центральной Азии и Казахстане была успешная система образования, измеряемая количественными показателями, такими как грамотность, начальное и среднее образование для детей школьного возраста, а также научные исследования, и часть этого наследия сохранилась до наших дней. Однако прежняя система образования ставила перед государством задачу построения новых образовательных систем – интернационализация высшего образования в этих странах после распада Советского Союза совпала с ростом глобализации. Исследователи, теоретики и практики образовательной сферы, государственные учреждения и гражданское общество в настоящее время изучают эти вопросы. Многие правительства начинают разрабатывать национальные стратегии интернационализации. В статье рассматриваются следующие вопросы: каковы интерпретации понятия интернационализации, какова текущая ситуация в образовательных процессах Казахстана и привели ли инструменты интернационализации к улучшению качества высшего образования в Казахстане в рамках рассматриваемой международной стипендиальной программы «Болашақ»? В статье использованы первичные источники, такие как национальная и международная статистика, официальная информация Министерства науки и высшего образования Республики Казахстан, новостные ресурсы, а также вторичные источники, такие как аналитика информационных агентств и аналитических центров. Мы утверждаем, что хорошо продуманная и реализуемая стратегия интернационализации системы образования окажет влияние не только на повышение конкурентоспособности казахстанских выпускников на мировом рынке труда, но и на конкурентоспособность экономики, и программа «Болашақ» достигла определенной степени успеха.

Ключевые слова: интернационализация, система высшего образования, развитие, совершенствование, университет, программа «Болашақ», Казахстан, образовательная сфера

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