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Modern state of the Internationalization of higher education of Kazakhstan

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Abstract

Higher education is a major factor of modernization of economy and society. Quality and competitiveness of higher education determines the competitiveness of the state in the international space. Internationalization of higher education, which is implemented in accordance with Kazakhstan's 2011-2020 State Program for Education Development, is one of the priorities of the integration of national education. A major step towards the internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan is the decision to implement higher education reform along the general lines of the Bologna process. In line with the national plan, the former types and levels of academic programs were transformed into to the three levels established under the Bologna framework: Bachelor, Master and PhD. Along with this, major changes are taking place in the teaching and learning process, the way curricula and programs are organised and delivered. This article discusses the major initiatives in the field of internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan, such as the state international scholarship "Bolashak", project of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan aimed at inviting visiting professors, academic mobility students and faculty from the leading universities all over the world.

Keywords: higher education; internalization of higher education; academic mobility;

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1. Introduction

Over the last decade substantial efforts have been made to modernize the national higher education system, make it competitive on the international level and enhance its quality and relevance. A major step towards the internationalisation of higher education in Kazakhstan is the decision to implement higher education reform along the general lines of the Bologna process. In line with the national plan, the former types and levels of academic programmes were transformed into to the three levels established under the Bologna framework: Bachelor, Master and PhD. Along with this, major changes are taking place in the teaching and learning process, the way curricula and programmes are organised and delivered. As a result of the reform it is expected that degrees offered in the country will be comparable with European degrees.

The Kazakhstan government is investing in the Bolashak Scholarship Programme through which talented young people are fully supported to study abroad in leading institutions. Over 2500 individuals are studying and have studied in more than 20 countries. Opening the country to international universities also contributes to some extent to internationalising the higher education system – currently there are 5 branches of foreign universities in the country.

Various other initiatives are being implemented to further accelerate the process of internationalisation – among them construction of modern facilities for a Scientific and Educational Complex in which the so-called “New University” will be established, with a programme to support hosting top-level professors and researchers from abroad to work as visiting scholars, attracting international students, supporting the international mobility of academic staff and students, international joint/collaborative research projects, the presence of Kazakhstan higher educational institutions and government agencies in international fora and international higher education organisations, signing international agreements (e.g., Magna Charta), etc.

2. International cooperation within the framework of State scholarship "Bolashak"

Kazakhstan's higher education system became a part of the European education space. One of the effective mechanisms of Kazakhstan's integration into global education is the unique program "Bolashak".

State International scholarship "Bolashak" established in 1993 by the decision of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nazarbayev. At the dawn of independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan required highly qualified personnel, who were to carry out further reforms and to represent the country on the world stage. For the first time in the history of post-Soviet states of talented young people were given the opportunity to be educated abroad. Scholarship "Bolashak" became a kind of guarantee of a successful career and professional fulfillment of its graduates. Year after year, the program grow and adapt to the implementation of government objectives. The first years of the program scholarship holders studied in only four countries (USA, UK, Germany and France). In the following, the geography of education expanded due to the development of cooperation with foreign universities, as well as with revising the rules for candidates selection, according to which candidates were chosen from the applicants studying abroad on their own.

In 2005, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan announced in his address to annually provide three thousand young and talented Kazakhs educational opportunities in leading educational institutions in the world. The need to increase the number of Fellows was caused by demand of the times.

At the present stage the scholarship focuses on masters and doctoral training programs, as well as training of technical and medical profile, which are the most in demand in Kazakhstan.

The basic principles of "Bolashak" program are:

- a high level of training for candidates;
- preservation of the positive image of the program in the country and abroad;
- competitive selection based on openness and fairness;
- sending the scholarship holders to the best universities in the world.

Every year the number of fellows and graduate programs are increased. Beginning in 2008, research and teaching staff are given the opportunity to have a research internship, as well as quotas for rural youth, government officials, and academic teaching staff.

The program "Bolashak", as one of the most important innovation of the early 90s, has become a powerful breakthrough in the internationalization of higher education. At the anniversary forum dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the International program, the President described the "Bolashak" as one of the "golden pages" in the history of independent Kazakhstan (http://www.bolashak.gov.kz/images/Bolashak_zhurnal/Bolashak_4.pdf).

For more than 20 years, the program "Bolashak" kept developing and improving in accordance with the modernization of the national economy strategic priorities. Program is an important component of public policies to increase the country's competitiveness.

The program has achieved impressive results. Thus, for as of October 2014, the program had awarded 10,941 scholarships. Today over 7,500 people of Kazakhstan have been educated within this Programme. Geography of awarded scholarships includes 33 countries (http://www.bolashak.gov.kz/images/Bolashak_zhurnal/Bolashak_4.pdf). In general, being a reliable source of progressive knowledge and world technologies to the economic and social sphere of the country, the program is considered to be the leading engine of the national education system.

Increasing the need for ideas and innovations expands opportunities for our young scientists as well. Over 70 Bolashak alumni who received PhDs, are successfully applying their knowledge in the leading research centers of our country such as Nazarbayev University, National Science Cardiac Centre, Centre for Earth Sciences, National Centre for Biotechnology, National Medical Holding, Lev Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Asfendiyarov Kazakh National Medical University and the Aykimbaev Kazakh Scientific Centre for Quarantine Infections. Bolashak alumni are contributing to the creation of innovation clusters around research centers aimed at developing zones of high-tech, knowledge-intensive companies that perform the most complex cardiac surgeries. Nowadays, about 1,500 scholars are studying in the leading universities and research centers of the USA, the UK, Germany, France, Japan, South Korea and Russia within specified academic areas.

According to the international experts, the program has become a model for countries aimed at developing human capital. Bolashak scholarship was called the best academic mobility program, according to the results of the comparative analysis of 11 programs of different countries, presented at the eighth International Going Global Conference in Miami (USA). Kazakhstan's experience is being examined by countries such as China, Poland, Finland and Ukraine and served as the basis for the Russian "Global Education" program for 2014–2016 (<http://www.bolashak.gov.kz/index.php/ru/k-20-letiyu-programmy-bolashak/mneniya-expertov/313-aslan-s-rinzhipov-programma-bolashak-stala-modelyu-dlya-gosudarstv>).

In fact, over two decades, the program Bolashak formed a powerful layer of the society - professionals who have received excellent education on the international level. Each of these alumni contributes something to bring the economy, social sphere, science and education to the best international standards. Among trained under the program "Bolashak" there are over 2,700 professionals in the field of innovative technologies, metallurgy, telecommunications, energy, oil and gas sector, 540 in the medical field, about 300 civil servants. Here Bolashakers act as translators of knowledge, because nearly a thousand alumni are working at the universities of the country, about 400 schools and colleges, 52-pedagogical and administrative teams at Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools. About 300 people are researchers of the Nazarbayev University, 77- PhD.

The program "Bolashak" gives a unique opportunity to build Kazakh universities' constructive dialogue with international colleagues, to discuss the advanced model of providing educational services, as well as prospects for raising the research potential of Kazakh universities, their internationalization within the academic mobility.

3. Academic mobility as a key mechanism for the internationalization of higher education

One of the important indicators of internationalization in the area of higher education is academic mobility of the students and the teaching staff, which helps to form the international space for higher education. The academic mobility of the students and teachers contributes to raising the quality of educational programs and the academic process as whole, and advancement of the research in an academic context. Such international programs, as Erasmus, Tempus, British Council, DAAD, CIBA, EduFrance are aimed at developing higher education internationalization.

One of the key points of the 2011-2020 State program of education development of the Republic of Kazakhstan is integration into the European space of domestic higher education, according to item 171 of the above mentioned program the Center of Bologna Process and the academic mobility was established as a subordinated organization of the Ministry of science and education of Kazakhstan (The decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On approving the 2011-2020 State program of education development of the Republic of Kazakhstan" as of December 7, 2010 No. 1118). From the moment of entry of Kazakhstan into Bologna Process, this Center has carried out essential positive reforms for improving mobility.

However, the research shows that the awareness of the Kazakhstani students of academic mobility accounts for 29,5%, the rest 70,4% of respondents have no idea of it (Abdiraimova, & Burkitbaev, 2014). Among its advantages the following have been listed: "experience exchange – 4,6%", "language practice - 3,9%", "receiving innovative knowledge and skills – 2,3%", "cultural exchange, developing international relations and contacts – 2,3%".

There are various types of academic mobility used at different universities all over the world, the most widespread option is when training period in the other university is no less than 1 semester (21% consider it necessary and it is often preferred to spend this period in a foreign higher educational institution). The other frequently used forms of the academic mobility are the following: short-term stay in a foreign higher educational institution for experience exchange, data collection, etc. (58,5%); joint research projects (40,8%).

It is interesting to note that 51% of respondents state that domestic education conforms to the international standards, inter alia 14,8% consider that it is better than education received at some university abroad. It can be argued that the main barriers for introducing external academic mobility programs are as follows: lack of resources (50,5%), poor language skills (49,8), administrative issues (getting visa, paperwork, accommodation problems - 42,7%), incompatibility of the contents, level and the periods of programs (26%), absence of accurately developed system for translation and accumulation of the credits.

Thus, one can state the following issues that restrict the academic mobility development in Kazakhstan:

- 1) the signed bilateral agreements or memorandums;
- 2) the approved curricula and programs, their inconsistency and inflexibility for integration;
- 3) language skills and available opportunities for confirmation of the appropriate language level.

Monitoring the academic mobility development in Kazakhstan can cover three main areas: visiting professors; incoming and outgoing academic mobility

Monitoring results of "The Involvement of Foreign Scholars" program showed that in 2014 52 higher education institutions invited 1,726 foreign scholars out of planned 1,790, i.e. about 96.4%, including: national higher education institutions – 1,094; the international higher education institution – 33; state universities – 415; reincorporated as JSC higher education institutions - 164; private higher education institutions – 20.

According to the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MES RK) No. 49 as of 21.02.2014 "On inviting foreign scholars to higher education institutions of the RK" 2, 886, 044, 000 tenge was allocated for inviting 1790 visiting professors to 52 higher education institutions (National higher education institutions – 12, private - 4). Out of this amount 52 higher education institutions in 2014 spent 1, 810, 233 124 tenge, i.e. about 62,7% (http://testent.ru/publ/obsuzhdenija_polzovatelej_i_gostej/obshhij_razdel/oficialnyj_sajt_ministerstva_obrazovanija_respubliki_kazakhstan/5-1-0-1653).

During the period under review, 785 scholars were invited from Europe, 85 scholars – from East Asia, 32 scholars – from Southeast Asia, 140 scholars – from the USA, 498 scholars – from the Russian Federation, 28 – from the Republic of Belarus, 158 – from the other countries.

In general, higher education institutions invite professors to teach disciplines according to the basic educational programs of the students. All the visiting professors have a degree: PhD, doctors and candidates of sciences. Also the disciplines taught cover no less than 2 ECTS credits.

Over the period of 2014 the following indicators show the teaching effectiveness of visiting scholars at Kazakhstani universities:

- Number of lectures taught – 27,305.5 hours;
- Number of workshops conducted – 16,295.5 hours;
- The number of consultations given - 24,658.5 hours;
- Conducted joint R & D - 209;
- Co-published academic/research/ methodological literature - 86;
- Joint publications (including those published in journals with non-zero impact factor) - 197;
- Joint patents, acts of implementation, commercialized R & D - 34;
- Transfer of new technologies/innovations to the academic process - 88.

Analysis of monitoring of academic mobility of students for the state budget within the program "Academic mobility of students" showed that in 2014, 52 universities sent 805 students to study abroad for a period of no less than 1 semester instead of the planned 600, including 616 people within bachelor's programs and 189 people within the master's program, including: national universities - 223; international university - 34; state universities - 377; reincorporated as JSC universities - 127; private universities - 44.

According to the Order of MES RK №28 as of 02.03.2014, in 2014, 629,748 million tenge has been allocated from budget for developing academic mobility of 52 universities for 600 students (national universities - 9, an international university - 1, state universities – 27, reincorporated as JSC universities – 11, private universities - 5). Out of these funds 52 universities spent 539, 524, 480 tenge in 2014, i.e. about 85.7% (http://testent.ru/publ/obsuzhdenija_polzovatelej_i_gostej/obshhij_razdel/oficialnyj_sajt_ministerstva_obrazovanija_respubliki_kazakhstan/5-1-0-1653).

As a result of monitoring the academic mobility of students was implemented in the following fields of study: Engineering sciences and technologies - 188 students; Social sciences, Economics and Business - 122; Services - 44; Agricultural sciences - 20; Education - 185; Sciences - 25; Law - 28;

Humanities - 99; Art - 24; Health and Social Security (Medicine) - 59; Veterinary science - 11 (<http://edu.gov.kz/ru/news/>).

According to the information given by the universities, disciplines studied abroad match the basic educational programs; the teachers have degrees: PhD, doctors and candidates of sciences, Masters.

Now we can look at the key indicators of internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan. This is the number of joint educational programs, their proportion in the total number of educational programs (EP) of the university; number of students and foreign students studying within those joint educational programs, their proportion in the total number of students at the university (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral programs).

As the experience of the US and European universities, occupying the top 100 positions in various ranking lists (www.topuniversities.com), shows, the best results in learning are achieved where joint educational programs are implemented [Bologna process: learning outcomes and competence-based approach (Baydenko, 2009)]. Data on implementing the joint educational programs (JEP), including Double Diploma programs (DDP) are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Data on implementing JEP in 2013, units per person

Title of the program		Number		
		Program	Students	Foreign students
Total number		2,906	209,583	1,076
Bachelor's program	JEP	218	27,240	435
	DDP	61	452	8
Master's program	JEP	250	3,282	69
	DDP	104	147	24
Doctoral program	JEP	69	410	2
	DDP	19	30	0
Total	JEP	537	30,932	506
	DDP	184	629	32

Monitoring of these indicators for the year 2013 shows that 19% of the total number of educational programs are implemented through the joint educational programs (JEP), including 7% in a bachelor's programs, 9% in master's programs, 2% in doctoral programs.

At the same time, the proportion of students who have studied within those joint educational programs, to the total number of the university students broken down into bachelor's, master's, doctoral programs is 13%, 2% and less than 0.5%, respectively.

In 2013, 239 teachers of the Kazakhstani universities studied within the International Program (IP) of multilingual education development, 739 teachers did international internship. Data on the number of the teachers with a breakdown into various forms of ownership of universities (national, state, reincorporated as JSC, private) are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Data on professional development of the university teaching staff

International programs of multilingual education	National	State	Reincorporated as JSC	Private	TOTAL
Bolashak	38	80	25	31	174

British Council	-	-	50	5	55
ACCELS	-	-	10	-	10
TOTAL	38	80	85	36	239
			Reincorporated as JSC	Private	
Internships abroad	National	State			TOTAL
Research-pedagogical	115	97	96	38	346
Professional	65	50	92	34	241
Linguistic	1	61	53	37	152
TOTAL	181	208	241	109	739
Total number of the Teaching staff	6626	11304	3491	3537	304

4. Conclusion

The internationalization of education, by definition, is the process of integrating various international dimensions into the research, academic and administrative activities of educational institutions of different levels. At the same time, academic mobility of students and teachers is an important and necessary part of it. Great importance is attached to it in education globally. Academic mobility is growing due to dynamic international and cross-country cooperation. It can be argued that this is particularly useful for students as they can receive comprehensive education in the chosen area, access to educational institutions and related educational services. Professional mobility for teachers provides professional growth, establishing professional contacts, advances in the quality of teaching and research.

Education internationalization, as a consequence of improving the education quality requires significant financial resources, which must be considered as economic investment with high yield and productivity. In Kazakhstan, education modernization reforms are being implemented. Some of them proved more effective and are being successfully implemented, the others are less effective and need to be further refined. All of these reforms have a common goal: significant and sustainable improvement of the national education quality.

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