

Saule Mazhitova<sup>1</sup>

## SOME ASPECTS OF STATE REGULATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN KAZAKHSTAN

*The article analyzes various aspects of state regulation of higher education, the approaches and methods of education management are determined, the disadvantages of excessive regulation are identified.*

*Keywords: higher education; educational services; the Ministry of Education; quality assurance in higher education.*

Сауле Мажітова

## ПРО ДЕЯКИ АСПЕКТИ ДЕРЖАВНОГО РЕГУЛЮВАННЯ СИСТЕМИ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ

*У статті проаналізовано різні аспекти державного регулювання сфери вищої освіти; відзначено підходи та методи управління освітою, виявлено недоліки надмірного регулювання.*

*Ключові слова: вища освіта; освітні послуги; Міністерство освіти; забезпечення якості вищої освіти.*

*Табл. 2. Літ. 19.*

Сауле Мажитова

## О НЕКОТОРЫХ АСПЕКТАХ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОГО РЕГУЛИРОВАНИЯ СИСТЕМЫ ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ КАЗАХСТАНА

*В статье проанализированы различные аспекты государственного регулирования сферы высшего образования; определены подходы и методы управления образованием, выявлены недостатки чрезмерного регулирования.*

*Ключевые слова: высшее образование; образовательные услуги, Министерство образования, обеспечение качества высшего образования.*

### **Problem definition**

Scientific researches confirm a direct correlation between economic development of a country and the level of education in it. Education is usually seen as a major source of economic growth in most countries. In this regard, there was a major review of state educational policy, which led to the diversification of human abilities development: educational system and the system of professional training.

### **Latest research and publications analysis**

Methodological approaches to research on education and its economic value was formulated in fundamental works by (Bekker, 1982; Schultz, 1963) and others who have made significant contributions to education system include without limitation education. They formed the idea of education as a basic element of national wealth, defined the nature and criteria of learning cost-effectiveness. Detailed discussion on the problem of learning cost-effectiveness can be found in Radaeva (1997), Alimbaev (1999) etc. The investment character of expenditures on education and the problems of higher educational institutions were investigated in E.Aymagambetov's (2004), S.Omirbaev's (2007), G.Nakipovas (2011), E.Aryn's, S.Mazhitovas (2001).

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<sup>1</sup> Karaganda Economic University, Republic of Kazakhstan.

The **research objective** is the identification of state role in the functioning of the higher education system.

**Key Research Findings**

Kazakhstan is developing under the conditions of global competition. At present the source of competitive advantage is the intellectual potential of the country, which is formed by the higher education system (Nazarbaev, 2010).

The development of the educational system is provided by the full participation of state. State is the guarantor of the rights of citizens to education and serves as a controller of the quality of educational process (<http://www.zakon.kz>, 2010).

Government regulation of educational system is manifested through legislative, administrative, social measures and means regulation of state and private universities, also the delivery of educational services by state universities funded from state budget.

The state's efforts have contributed to a qualitative transformation in the educational system: a system of funding was introduced based on student grants, a number of decision-making processes were decentralized and the assurance mechanism of higher education was reformed. However, the issue of quality of higher education is still under state responsibility.

Quality assurance is a catch-all term primarily focused on achieving a high level of quality and accountability (Damitov, 2006). However, there is usually a dilemma between quality improvement and accountability: different systems of education have a different balance between these goals. Quality assurance covers the following aspects:

- Regulations (regulations, duties, responsibilities etc.);
- Educational process (receive support in the process of learning, assessment etc.);
- Development and maintenance of curriculum and programs (levels and standards, approval system etc.);
- The process of acquiring knowledge (complaints and appeals, the experience of students etc.);
- Results (qualifications, diplomas, security, mobility, recognition, value etc.).

**Table 1. The institutional and legal matrix of the education market in Kazakhstan\***

Formal restrictions	Unformal restrictions	Control mechanisms
The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan	Traditions and customs	The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.
The Civil Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan	Traditions and customs that exist among students, including, various student organizations	Local education authorities
Other regulations and laws, decrees of the President	Subordinate agencies and organizations	Statutes of higher education institutions

\* built according to (Mazhitova, 2008; Omirbaev, 2007).

Based on this background information, we will illustrate the steps taken in Kazakhstan in recent years, Table 1.

There is some deregulation, and yet there are various controls and bureaucratic procedures that all schools must follow.

Group of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Damitov, 2006), which conducted a study on the problems of education in Kazakhstan, has a theory that higher education will be able to contribute more to improving the country's competitiveness in a more decentralized system of quality assurance. This system needs to shift from quality control to assessing the quality of its maintenance and improvement. Universities should be given greater freedom and independence, but to strengthen transparency and accountability in their work. Experience from other countries shows that this kind of change could lead to real benefits, including the improvement of research institutions, the improvement of learning processes, as well as the requirements at the labor market.

The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) is the main authority in higher education of the country. State retains total control at the central level, aimed at maintaining order and control in the prevention of corruption in higher education.

One of the priorities of the national education policy is improving the management of education quality and the formation of a regulatory framework for the National System of quality assessment. The quality assurance system in Kazakhstan initially developed in the direction of quality control and state regulation, and in recent years – in the direction of quality assurance, although the level of government regulation is high.

As part of a national education system, quality assessment was introduced for internal and external evaluation of education quality. For external evaluation organizations there are the procedures of licensing, certification, accreditation and ranking. The evaluation of the educational services quality and determining the level of the individual study subjects are to be conducted in the form of centralized testing at the completion of each stage of secondary education and external evaluation of educational achievements of undergraduate courses in universities, Table 2.

**Table 2. Government agencies in the field of higher education quality\*\***

Government agencies	Function
The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MES of the Republic of Kazakhstan)	The main authority in the field of higher education. Establish a common policy and strategy
Committee for Control in Education and Science (MES of the Republic of Kazakhstan)	Supervision and certification of all universities in the country, including grant and revocation of licenses
National Center for Educational Quality Assessment (NCEQA)	Monitoring system of higher education
National Accreditation Centre (NAC)	Institutional accreditation
Certification center of Quality Management and Consulting (CCMC)	Facilitating certification support and administrative processes
National Center of State Education Standards and Testing (NTSGSOT)	Elaboration of standards and requirements

\*\* built according to (Mazhitova, 2006; Omirbaev, 2007).

The Government of Kazakhstan has developed a regulatory framework and created different government organizations and committees, the purpose of which is to monitor and improve the quality of higher education. However, in practice, the result

was the formation of overregulated system in which government agencies and organizations in the field of quality duplicate their functions and present an overload for schools.

Since the central government defines through various state agencies a strategy in the field of higher education, as well as implements quality control mechanisms, higher education institutions have to respond and follow them. The example of the processes that are still exposed to strict regulation by the state, is student enrollment. In Kazakhstan university applicants must pass the Unified National Test (UNT) or its equivalent – comprehensive testing. The government sets the minimum passing score, and educational institutions take prospective students on the basis of their obtained scores. The second element of state's participation is awarding educational grants in accordance with the state order.

The state carries out periodic inspections of public and private institutions for compliance with state standards as part of their evaluation, in the result of which, an educational institution that does not meet the quality control could lose its license. Today, this sphere can be attributed to the number of those where state gradually reduces its power of influence, however, the theoretical freedom of universities in practice is significantly limited. Freedom of choice is restricted, including the number of allocated hours, and the need for providing good results when students pass the external assessment of academic achievement (EAAA). EAAA (The Decree of Ministry of Education ..., 2012) includes testing on 4 majors, carried out to observe the development of educational programs, public mandatory standards of higher education for undergraduates. This test is to monitor the quality of educational services and to determine the level of studying academic disciplines, public mandatory standards of higher education for undergraduates. This control system limits the freedom of teaching and the process of making decision; it also affects the quality in a negative way and does not comply with the needs of the labor market. Mechanism that would guarantee the satisfaction of students learning process in Kazakhstan is not yet developed at the state level.

Kazakhstan has taken measures on decentralization of educational processes, but there are still some problems:

1. *A large number of initiatives are implemented at the same time.* There have been various regulatory measures in a short period of history: licensing, accreditation, certification processes, EAAA etc. However, dispersion of measures, too many institutions and committees, changes in the regulatory framework are leading to confusion and stress in the higher education system. This may be explained with the pace of reforms in the country, and yet it is needed to understand which approaches are the most effective.

2. *The introduction of new models without changing the basic structures.* Both the government and universities have experimented with new approaches to quality assurance that are effective in other countries, but did not get the expected results. Schools respond to new models as they used to reacted to previous instructions, i.e. demonstrate compliance of requirements, rather than showing institutional self-responsibility, as they are the owners of this process.

3. *Maintaining independence in the general assessment of quality.* An important achievement of Kazakhstan is the establishment of the National Center for

Educational Quality Assessment (NCEQA) the purpose of which is to carry out a general assessment of education at all levels, from pre-primary to higher education. However, the Center is a subordinate structure of MES and may face some political risks and pressure in the future.

An example of a proactive approach to evaluating the quality of education is the analysis of the passing of Unified national test for admission to universities, conducted NCEQA. To this day, the test was used basically as a "filter" for admission to higher education institutions and to redirect the less prepared students to other educational levels. However, the Center's analysis allows us to compare the results of high school graduates in all subjects, thus providing information about schools, how well they prepare students for higher education in comparison with each other. It is advisable to consider the possibility of a comparative analysis of the results for the universities as well.

*4. The role of testing quality assurance.* Testing graduate students is an important component of quality assurance in higher education. It is difficult to find direct equivalent procedures of external evaluation of educational achievements countries (EAAA) in other countries that is used in Kazakhstan.

There is a reason to wonder about whether the passing EAAA tool to ensure the quality of higher education and its promotion. First, any test can lead to the fact that schools and students will be more concerned about the test rather than studying. The tests are aimed at determining the measurable components of the educational process, but remain virtually untouched the questions that require critical thinking. This "restriction" can be justified at lower levels of training, but at higher levels, where vast knowledge and creativity are important, it becomes a problem. Second, due to the fact that when testing is necessary to check what was taught, the standard national test is possible only in the cases where there are standard national curriculum. As stated earlier, when discussing state standards, some authors (Omirbaev, 2007) believe that the imposition of single rigid model of learning in higher education is undesirable. This may hinder the development of their own standards of educational programs to meet labor market needs, wishes and interests of students, educational institutions, since the latter are restricted by expected test results.

*5. Accreditation as a tool of state control or institutional improvement.* Under current conditions, an important sign of success and achievement is to demonstrate compliance with the criteria of quality of an educational institution established by independent outside organizations. Despite the fact that the licence for educational activity proves the correspondence of educational process to the minimum criteria of quality, educational institutions are looking for additional ways to demonstrate the quality of education provided. Some of them state they have achieved a high level of quality just because we were able to pass the certification and certify their work in accordance with ISO-9000-specific administrative processes, while others consider them qualitative, because they are members of international or participate in international projects. None of these methods provides the full quality of educational processes.

An addition to the evaluation of higher education quality in Kazakhstan was accreditation; it allows us go from oriented to needs of government control and monitoring quality to support and encourage schools to ensure high level of knowledge,

rational internal processes and means of controls, honest self-evaluation and culture in general cultivation. A National Accreditation Centre's (NAC) methodology of accreditation is based on the experience of foreign countries in the field of higher education quality assurance (Nakipova, 2011).

An overlap exists between attestation and accreditation, which is currently regulated by legislation, also Kazakh universities do not consider it necessary to have both certification and accreditation, while accreditation is much more conducive to the improvement of quality than certification. Accreditation aims to achieve improvements (not compliance and control), and to strengthen the capacity of universities to provide educational services. Therefore, if we accept accreditation as a major tool to promote and achieve high quality higher education system, there will be no need for carrying out other validation.

International experience shows that the quality control by MES and other public agencies in order to be more effective would be entrusted to an independent agency of accreditation with the direct involvement of professional associations and/or employers. In higher education it is appropriate to develop and implement policies of institutional responsibility and self-esteem, including the development of new mechanisms of institutional self-esteem oriented on results, rather than focusing on processes.

### Conclusions

The role of public authorities, in our opinion, should be strategic management and quality control of the work of independent agencies, with subsequent analysis of the quality assurance system in general and the role of all entities of educational activities, to make the system more efficient and less duplicated.

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