The Political Economy of Education in Central Asia

Evidence from the Field

Edited by
Naureen Durrani · Hélène Thibault

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Surrounded between Europe and Asia, Central Asia has been neglected by many experts for a very long time. Many reasons may explain this situation, such as the language barrier and the fact that the region remained inaccessible for the most part of the 20th Century. However, this situation is clearly about to change in light of the growing interest of the academic interest for this region and the purpose of this series is to enhance the understanding of this region which is has always been at the crossroad of various civilizations. From a multidisciplinary perspective, this series examines the history of the region, its past struggles with colonialism and communism as well as the political and sociological challenges Central Asian countries are currently facing with the emergence of the new Silk Road and the strategic power shift in the region. It also proposes to render accessible to English-speaking readers the important oral literary tradition of Central Asia, which is one of the largest in the world.

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Editors

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Foreword

This edited book, exploring the political economy of education in Central Asia, is one of the outputs of the Political Economy of Education Research (PEER) Network, a three-year collaboration between the University of Ulster, the University of Sussex, the University of Cape Town, and the Nazarbayev University (2020–2023). The project aimed to bring together researchers from Central Asia and Africa, in their distinct regions, and together, to explore the way political economy and education systems, processes and practices interact, particularly in contexts of conflict and crisis, which these days, unfortunately, constitutes far too many parts of the world. The aim of the project was to support the production of new knowledge, new perspectives, and new understandings of the complex ways that education intersects with local, national, regional and global economic, political, cultural, and social factors and actors, and the effects of this on the possibility of education supporting the construction of sustainable, equitable, socially just societies. At the heart of the project was a recognition of the need to work with early career scholars from the two regions, to share information and knowledge, and to support them in their career development, at a time when the winds of economic and political crises threaten to undermine, delay, and subvert their aspirations. The early career researchers all became PEER Network Fellows.

With chapters from many of the PEER Network Central Asia Fellows, the book has been expertly edited by our colleagues at Nazarbayev University: Professor Naureen Durrani and Dr. Hélène Thibault, who have led the PEER Network Central Asia hub since its inception in 2020. Together with Dr. Assel Sharimova, they have also written an insightful introduction to the book that sheds light on the complexities of the political economy of education in Central Asia, the research gaps, and research possibilities. As the editors note, this is an under-researched area and this is a unique and important publication. It provides us with fascinating insights into the complexity of post-Soviet education systems, actors, and processes in Central Asia and their challenges. The book undoubtedly raises more questions than answers and will without doubt become an important reference point for further research on the political economy of education in the region. As the rich and distinctive chapters show, covering a range of countries, topics, and issues, education is an important challenge in the region, and studying and researching education provides a way in to exploring complex issues of gender, marginalisation, inequality, identity, ethnicity, class, nationalism, and power, in a region still in transition from the legacies of Soviet rule, and not immune to the momentous and ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Post-Cold War period.

It has been a great honour to work with these inspiring colleagues as they have developed their projects, and the process is as important as the final product. It is also wonderful to see the voices and thinking of these researchers in print, and to know that there is a new generation of scholars in Central Asia thinking about and researching on the political economy of education in the region. As this book clearly shows, education matters in this region. It matters for the economy, it matters for social cohesion, peace, and harmony, and most importantly, it matters for social justice. But education cannot be understood without reference to the broader local, national, regional, and global political economy—in all its diversity—and these chapters provide us with food for thought on these issues and help us to think through new and imaginative ways to ensure that

education systems and processes can better help us to bring forth more socially just and equitable societies that the peoples of this region deserve.

June 2023   Mario Novelli
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Acknowledgements

Contents

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CA	Central Asia
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CORA	Committee on Religious Affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
GER	Goss Enrolment Ratio
GONGO	Government-Organised Non-Governmental Organisations
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IBC	International Branch Campus
KASSR	The abbreviation is used for two historic periods of Kazakhstan: Kirghiz Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic that was created in 1920 and Kazakh Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic that was created in 1925
KazNarKomPros	People's Commissariat of Education in KASSR
Likpunkts	Offices for liquidation of illiteracy
LMSU	Lomonosov Moscow State University
MCDA	Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis
MoI	Medium of Instruction
NarKomPros	People's Commissariat of Education
NAUz	National Archive of Uzbekistan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
PEER Network	Political Economy of Education Research Network
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

SEN	Special Education Needs
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
UN	United Nations Organization
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VET	Vocational Education and Training

List of Figures

List of Tables

Understanding the Political Economy of Education: Exploring Debates in Central Asia

Assel Sharimova, Naureen Durrani, and Hélène Thibault

INTRODUCTION

Education is not immune from larger societal issues and processes. The content and outcomes of educational policies and interventions both affect and are affected by the relationships between political and economic structures, institutions and agents at local, national and global levels that political economy analysis can unpack (Novelli et al., 2014; Robertson, 2012). The common point within various existing definitions of political economy analysis is the interplay between political and economic processes, the allocation of power and resources, as well as the underpinning system and processes that generate, maintain and change these dynamics through time (Daoust & Novelli, 2020). The research literature

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in the field of the political economy of education covers a range of disciplines. It utilises different approaches to political economy, varying from a minimal neoclassical perspective that is interested only in political factors hindering market performance to a very broad 'cultural political economy' that seeks to investigate how geography, gender, culture and politics relate to economic issues; equally, the field varies in its focus from an 'orthodox political economy' which provides reductionistic policy solutions to a 'critical political economy' which explores the tensions, inconsistencies and inequalities found in society and in educational systems (Novelli et al., 2014). Therefore, educational injustices are not limited to economics and human capital; rather, a complete picture of educational inequalities can be obtained by combining economics, politics, geography and culture (Novelli, 2016). Acknowledging the dual role of education as both a powerful mechanism of social reproduction in societies and a driver of social change (Robertson & Dale, 2015), this book attempts to contribute to the international conversation among researchers, policymakers and practitioners about critical political economy analysis of education and promote it as a helpful analytical tool for educational debates in Central Asian countries.

The transformation and evolution of education systems in Central Asian countries are closely related to the challenges and opportunities all these republics have faced since gaining independence in 1991. In the midst of profound economic, social and political changes, education became an object of contention. Inheriting a relatively good education system with almost universal school attendance rates, each country had to establish a national education system with updated curricula content to prepare graduates for the national and global competitive labour market (Bridges, 2014; Chapman et al., 2005). Commenting recently on the post-Soviet transformation of education, Silova and Niyozov (2020) argue that these countries have a mixed transition: on the one hand, maintaining Soviet educational legacies and, in some circumstances, reviving pre-Soviet traditions, but on the other hand, making a set of policy changes signifying the adoption of Western educational principles including, among others, decentralised management and funding of education, higher education privatisation, standardised student assessment, and liberalisation of textbook publishing and internationalisation of higher education by aligning university curricula with the Bologna Process, establishing international or joint universities and

sending students from the region to universities in other parts of the world.

Although these countries have followed diverse paths since the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991), there has been a noticeable convergence across the region in the rhetoric of education policy discourse with the pervasive emphasis on the political and economic aims of education, where questions around the quality of education have gained more prominence in scholarly research compared with questions of equity (Chankseliani & Silova, 2018; Hernández-Torrano et al., 2021; Tabaeva et al., 2021). While the influence of liberal, neoliberal, nationalist, or Islamic values on Central Asian communities and education is growing, the ability or likelihood of these new and re-emerging discourses to ensure equitable development is an important question (Niyozov et al., 2020). Reflecting on the role that education systems play in supporting or undermining the adaptive capacity of societies to cope with ever-changing tensions and pressures associated with both the legacies of the past and the challenges of the present, it has become very important to reflect on the role of education in strengthening or undermining socially cohesive and flourishing societies. This reflection is particularly important for newly independent states, including Central Asian countries (Heyneman & Todoric-Bebic, 2000).

To set the scene for the present book, the next part of the chapter provides reflections on some challenges related to education and social cohesion in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as contributions of this book are related to these states. These reflections are followed by an explanation of the project that united all the authors of this book chapters and the introduction of the contributions to this volume.

Education and Social Cohesion

Education has a multifaceted impact on social cohesion (Novelli & Smith, 2011). As a long-standing concept in social thought, social cohesion has different interpretations (Green et al., 2006). While some definitions relate it to a 'common identity and a sense of belonging', others stress 'active civil society' or 'equality and social solidarity' (Green & Janmaat, 2016, p.171). Most definitions associate the term with social justice and equity, linking it with societal features, such as solidarity, respect, inclusion, positive relationships, collectivity and common purpose. In line with this, one of the implicit agreements within the recent proposal of

a new 'social contract for education' (UNESCO, 2021b) is that schools and teachers should be facilitators of empathy and support for different histories, languages, cultures and a variety of social movements.

A helpful analytical framework to reflect on the existing challenges for education to promote social cohesion in selected Central Asian countries is a critical '4 Rs' perspective that connects analytical dimensions of redistribution, recognition, representation and reconciliation (Novelli et al., 2015). This framework combines Nancy Fraser's (1995, 2005) perspectives on social justice and the work of Johan Galtung (1976, 1990) and John-Paul Lederach (1996, 1997) on peacebuilding and reconciliation. This framework acknowledges the various kinds of injustice and inequality that frequently promote contemporary conflicts and crises, as well as the need to address the legacies of these conflicts in and through education. Pointing to the close interconnections between the four Rs, the framework focuses on inequalities within the education system. Redistribution is related to equity in education access and resources for all groups in society, including previously marginalised and disadvantaged. Recognition is related to respect for and affirmation of variety and identities in educational institutions, procedures and curricula, including those relating to ability, gender, ethnicity, language, culture and religion. Representation refers to participation in governance and decision-making at all levels of the education system regarding the distribution and use of human and material resources. Reconciliation entails addressing prior events, injustices and consequences of conflicts, along with developing trusting relationships.

Access to education is the very minimum requirement for redistributive equity. All three Central Asian countries covered in the book—Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan—are committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030, including SDG 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UNESCO, 2020a). Committing to ensuring Education for All, Central Asian education systems have near-universal enrolment at primary and secondary levels as well as literacy. However, despite relatively quick economic growth, urban–rural differences in education quality, learning opportunities, employment and economic success continue, posing considerable challenges to social cohesion (UNESCO, 2020a).

The region's sudden transition from the command economy of the Soviet era, the economic crisis and the concentration of economic development in the nation's major cities have devastatingly impacted education

in rural schools (Egéa, 2020). Despite ongoing reforms in education systems, the rural–urban school gap is a persistent challenge for Central Asian governments (Alieva & Kovyazina, 2021; Egéa, 2020; Tajik et al., 2022). According to the Programme for International Student Assessment outcomes in Kazakhstan, poor performance can be seen in rural and urban schools in low-performing regions, while top-performing regions show the biggest disparity between rural and urban schools (Marteau, 2020). Inequitable academic preparedness of rural graduates is associated with access to higher education (Chankseliani et al., 2020). Moreover, a concern for the region is the disparities in higher education completion rates between those in urban and rural areas (UNESCO, 2021a).

Simultaneously, critical for redistributive justice is access to education for students with special educational needs. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have adopted a path towards more inclusive education, which emerged as a value in international education policy since the United Nations Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). The statement challenged the notion of disability, which previously had been considered as stemming from a lack of ability and placed more responsibility on governments and society for removing obstacles to learning in educational systems (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2022). As in many other countries, the transition to an inclusive education system is not an easy road, particularly because of the countries' context where children with functional impairments have historically been educated in segregated educational environments (Helmer et al., 2020; Lapham, 2020; Makoelle, 2020). Although the countries introduced progressive policies and practices in support of inclusive education, pointing to the absence of a single and quick solution, the growing research in the region suggests financial investments for providing proper infrastructure and resources as well as attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and skills of teachers and other stakeholders as still the most common challenges in creating opportunities for all students with special educational needs to be able to learn alongside their able-bodied peers (Helmer et al., 2020; Lapham, 2020; Makoelle, 2020; Nam, 2019; Passeka & Somerton, 2022; Rouse et al., 2014).

Equally, the requirement for redistributive equity in the education system is also related to the language of instruction. Therefore, decisions regarding the languages used in education systems are complicated and controversial in increasingly multicultural and multilingual nations. When implemented effectively, 'inclusive and equity-based language education policies' can improve social cohesion, foster trust between governments

and minority populations, and enhance children's lives (UNICEF, 2016b, p.v). However, the significant role of the language(s) in forming a cohesive national identity should be understood within the context of a complex reality of the various important roles of the mother tongue, the national language and a global lingua franca (Durrani et al., 2017). Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Central Asian states were left with the legacy of a multi-ethnic population, a segregated mono-lingual educational system, and low status and proficiency in the state language (Stoianova & Angermann, 2018). Since obtaining their independence, by developing the state language, the countries are still in the process of changing the balance between the state languages and the Russian language, which was dominant during the Soviet time. Simultaneously, English language has also grown to symbolise modernisation and internationalisation as these countries seek to forge closer linkages to the global economy (Ahn & Smagulova, 2022; Bezborodova & Radjabzade, 2022; Goodman & Kambatyrova, 2022). Therefore, considering the redistribution, recognition and reconciliation aspects of the 4R framework with the language of instruction policies, each country has to strike a balance between several objectives, including elevating the status of the state language in relation to the Russian language, ensuring that everyone receives effective mother tongue and state language education, and fostering proficiency in both Russian as a second/foreign language and international languages like English; in this regard, bilingual/multilingual education is increasingly being acknowledged as a powerful tool throughout Central Asia (Bahry et al., 2017). However, due to various internal and external factors informing and influencing change in Central Asia, productive areas for research are 'emerging sources of agency and language change in contexts of conflicting national and post-national, post-imperial and globalising ideologies' (Ahn & Smagulova, 2022, p. 21) and the role of education policies on the language of instruction and their implementation plays in strengthening or undermining social cohesion and prosperity of Central Asian societies.

Finally, being part of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are crucial for progress across all SDGs (United Nations, 2015), and education plays a crucial role in promoting it by shaping identities and transforming gender norms, roles and duties for women and men (Durrani & Halai, 2018; UNICEF, 2016a). One of the main considerations of redistributive gender equity within the education field is the need for equity and

non-discrimination in education access for women and men. Promoting inclusive education, the reviewed countries have gender parity in school enrolment and completion, except for Tajikistan, where girls are disadvantaged (UNICEF, 2022). Therefore, while in Tajikistan, girls in higher education institutions make up 36.4% (Garibova, 2022), in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, girls in higher education comprise 45.7% (Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2022a) and 54% (Information & Analytical Center, 2022), respectively. At the same time, like much of the world, the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields across the region is still recognised as an important question to address (Almukhambetova in this volume; Almukhambetova & Kuzhabekova, 2020; Kataeva, 2022; UNESCO, 2021a). Moreover, a particular challenge for education systems in the region is associated with the female teachers' overrepresentation in public schools (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022; Information & Analytical Center, 2022; Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2022b) and, similar to much of the world, female under-representation in leadership positions of educational institutions (Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, 2019; Kataeva & DeYoung, 2017; Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2017; UNESCO, 2020b).

As for the recognition of gender equity, which is related to respect for and affirmation of inclusive gender identities in education content, the existing literature suggests that this question receives limited consideration in the region's curricular documents (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017). Recent studies point out that male characters, both in texts and in images, still dominate in school textbooks in Kazakhstan (Durrani et al., 2022; Bekzhanova in this volume; Fedoseev, 2022), portraying males in public and professional spheres, while women are primarily represented at home (Durrani et al., 2022; Palandjian et al., 2018). In this regard, commenting on research on post-social education transformations, Palandjian et al. (2018) argued that the gendered dimension of political, economic and social transformations in former Soviet Union countries has largely been omitted, and analysing these shifts in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia and Armenia, they suggest that school textbooks reinforced and at the same time challenged gendered norms, facilitating the formation of identities distinct from gendered mainstream rhetoric. In this way, complicating our understanding of post-socialist transformations, the authors argue that although socialist legacies mix with (western) neoliberal imaginaries,

perpetuating patriarchal gender norms of modernity, there are counternarratives that rely on premodern imaginaries, including indigenous traditions and nature-centred spiritualities, and provide more nuanced symbolic portrayals of women and men. At the same time, as further compounded by the uniqueness of the developments in Central Asian states, which include religious revival after the fall of the Soviet Union (Thibault, 2021), the official rhetoric of gender equality in the countries could be counterproductive in the context of the revival of conservative Islamic teachings (Zhussipbek et al., 2020). Overall, in line with global trends, post-Soviet gender research in Central Asia is currently increasing in the fields of sociology, demography and political economy (Kataeva et al., 2023). It is hoped that further research on gender equality in and through education in the unique context of a mixture of traditional, Soviet and Western values concerning gender role expectations (Almukhambetova & Kuzhabekova, 2021) will contribute to the equitable development of societies in the region.

Aiming to contribute to the abovementioned educational debates in Central Asia, this book brings together various perspectives on the reviewed and other challenges for education in the context of what Silova et al. (2021) call 'multiple post-socialist education trajectories', which is contrasted with the dominant understanding of post-socialist education transformations through the colonial power structure where the history is written in the only way with dichotomous frameworks such as East or West, socialism or capitalism and authoritarianism or democracy. To do so, all chapters in the book draw on empirical studies carried out by early career researchers within the framework of the collaborative initiative discussed below.

Collaborative Initiative

Aiming to improve the quality of political economy analysis of education and to redress the North/South imbalances in the current knowledge production practices within this field, researchers from four universities, Ulster University (Northern Ireland), the University of Sussex (England), Nazarbayev University (Kazakhstan) and the University of Cape Town (South Africa), initiated a collaborative project 'Political Economy of Education Research Network' (PEER Network). The PEER

Network (www.peernetworkgcrf.org) is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK), under the Global Challenges Research Fund and managed by UK Research and Innovation.

As well as providing free access to online tools and resources to inform and facilitate effective political economy analysis of education in countries affected by conflict or crisis, the PEER Network aims at developing regional hubs of expertise in Central Asia and Africa. To support the development of early career researchers in these regions, the PEER Network commissioned research studies as part of the Research and Practice Fellowships in the Political Economy of Education. Deriving from these small-scale empirical studies, undertaken by the Central Asia hub's fellows during 2022 and 2023, the chapters in this book are intended as an original contribution to the educational debates. Increasing local voices in Central Asian educational research, the chapters in this book promote a critical economy analysis as a helpful analytical tool to examine the challenges to education in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan are not featured in the book since, at the time of recruitment, we did not receive any applications from Turkmenistan, and one selected participant from Kyrgyzstan dropped out along the way. Despite some regional limitations, the book could be a useful source of knowledge for policymakers, practitioners and scholars in Central Asia and beyond. The rest of this chapter will introduce each contribution of the book.

Contributions

The reflections on the political economy of education in Central Asia in this volume begin with Diana Toimbek. Based on archival research, in Chapter 2, the author explores the main political and socio-economic initiatives implemented by the revolutionary Soviet administration in the 1920s. Toimbek reveals that Soviet authorities viewed education not only as a way to fight illiteracy but also as a way to enlighten the masses and shape Soviet citizenry within the colonised territories of Central Asia. Focusing on another legacy of the Soviet Union, in Chapter 3, Aigerim Mussabalinova explores the provision of education to children with special educational needs in the region where the Soviet Union had the primary testing site for nuclear weapons during the Cold War. Drawing on thirty interviews with teachers, medical professionals, social workers and civil activists, the author suggests that the lack of resources, commitment and

the Soviet educational legacy has hindered the development of inclusive education in the region since independence.

Focusing on the challenge of education systems to address the religious revival that took place after the fall of the Soviet Union, in Chapter 4, Zilola Khalilova explores the evolution of education policies concerning the teaching of religion over the last 30 years in Uzbekistan. Based on archival research and textbook analysis, the author reveals that the teaching of religion is approached from an academic perspective, with an emphasis on promoting moderate teachings of Islam and instilling ideological immunity against religious fundamentalism. Continuing the discussion of the relationship between religion and education, in Chapter 5, Rahimjon Abdugafurov explores the views of four prominent religious figures in Uzbekistan about women's participation in higher education and the choice of profession. The author argues that their male-centred approach to women's participation in higher education contributes to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and might have a negative impact on female enrolment in atypical fields and confine women to professions associated with care, such as teachers and nurses.

Ainur Almukhambetova further deliberates on the theme of gender equality in Chapter 6. Drawing on the analysis of twenty-two interviews with science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) educators from five teacher-training universities in Kazakhstan, the author presents insights into gender awareness and understanding of gender-responsive pedagogies and suggests mitigating strategies to eliminate gendered practices in STEM teaching. In Chapter 7, Zhazira Bekzhanova has continued reflecting on gender equality in and through education in Kazakhstan. Exploring the manifestation of gender in the school curriculum, the author analyses school textbooks for the History of Kazakhstan, a compulsory subject across grades 7 to 11. Observing variations between grades, the author argues that the reviewed textbooks discriminate against women and ethnic minorities. Finally, contributing to the discussion of gender equality, in Chapter 8, based on a mixed-methods study, which included a survey and interviews with higher education students in the capital of Kazakhstan, Alexandra Nam explores the relationship between the language of instruction and students' conceptualisation of national identity and their attitudes towards gender roles. Finding a strong association between the language of instruction and students' attitudes expressed towards national identity and gender roles, Nam argues that students from Kazakh-medium groups reported higher

knowledge of the Kazakh language, a stronger sense of national identity, and more traditional attitudes towards gender roles than students from the Russian language groups.

Continuing the reflections on the language used in education, in Chapter 9, Fariza Tolesh provides some insights into the experiences of Uzbek Kazakhstanis. Drawing on twenty interviews, the author explored the educational and employment opportunities for ethnic minorities in the light of the prominence given to Kazakh language since independence. Tolesh found that Uzbeks do not face significant challenges in terms of employment and access to education but that the use of Uzbek language tends to decline within communities. The challenge for education in Central Asia regarding the language of instruction is further highlighted in Chapter 10 by Vasila Bozichaeva, who examines the perspectives of students and teachers regarding equity-minded assessment in three higher education institutions in Tajikistan and finds that students with special educational needs and those whose mother tongue is a minority language lack proper services due to inadequate assessment tools and educators' recognition of the needs of linguistic minorities and students with disabilities.

The last two chapters shift our attention to actors operating beyond the national education systems. In Chapter 11, Sherzod Khaydarov attempts to disentangle the factors associated with the increase of Russian international branch campuses in Uzbekistan based on policy document analysis and interviews with university administrators and faculty. Khaydarov's findings reveal that Uzbekistan's main objectives were to fulfil the shortage of university places and train professionals, whereas Russia's were to boost its soft power and train professionals for its own labour market. Finally, in Chapter 12, Natalya Hanley analyses the sustainability of education programmes provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Kazakhstan. Drawing on a mixed-method study, the author discusses the historical development of NGOs in the country and the funding challenges of these organisations. Hanley's findings showed how different funding sources underpin and shape the NGOs' vision for providing education programmes.

Overall, the chapters in this book attempt to highlight the ways education in Central Asia affects and is affected by the relationship between political, economic and social-cultural contexts at the local, national and global levels. While some authors used the Political Economy Analysis

of Education to highlight the existing challenges, imbalances and asymmetries, others also suggest potential ways to partially address systemic issues in and through education to promote equal development of the societies. Although the contributions do not provide a full list of political and economic forces shaping education in Central Asia, the volume may offer insights into salient challenges and opportunities for improving the education systems and, in this way, contribute to the educational debates in Central Asian countries.

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Fighting Illiteracy and Political Enlightenment: Soviet Educational Policies in the 1920s

Diana Toimbek

Introduction

Education policies during the Soviet regime reflected the political and socio-economic agenda of the ruling government and played an important role in "a nation's sense of identity and national awareness" (Smith, 1997, p. 281). In the early Soviet period, Bolshevik leaders believed that the fate of the regime and *proletariat* (working class) revolution lies in the transformation of the "consciousness", creating a new culture, raising the new strata of the communist *intelligentsia*, and "promoting the distinct sense of nationhood" (David-Fox, 2016; Smith, 1997, p. 282). The education system had become a ground for not only the economic advancement of socialism but also the instrument of solidifying the political control over the vast territory and "a weapon for the Communist transformation of society" (Lauglo, 1988, p. 293). Although the sense

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of belonging to a wider community in pre-Soviet Kazakhstan had more socio-cultural connotations, its political meaning was acquired via the gradual inculcation of ideologically "right" education and forced political, economic, and socio-cultural changes during the early Soviet period.

Kazakhstan was formed in the middle of the fifteenth century when geopolitical circumstances in the Central Asian region led different Turkic tribes, clans, and families to separate from Uzbek Khanate to the Jetisu region. During the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries, this "multi-ethnic" political union, also known as "Kazakhs", stretched across the steppe to the Caspian Sea in the west and the Altai Mountains in the east. In the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries, khans of Kazakh hordes gradually signed *poddanstvo* (suzerainty) treaties with the Russian Empire to form a temporary alliance against stronger enemies, which consequently led to Kazakhs' colonization. Although governed by a military administration, Kazakhs experienced little changes in socio-cultural life under the Tsarist rule. The educational system consisted of mostly religious education in ancient Arabic and later Arabic-Persian and Turkic languages (Keller, 2001; Ubiria, 2015). Later, the necessity of an administrative apparatus for imperial services and pro-Russian elites in the region stimulated the introduction of Russian-Kazakh schools with a strict class system of entrance (Sembayev, 1962; Ubiria, 2015).

The following historical changes of the October Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Union radically transformed the education system. In Marxist theory, domination leverages of the *proletariat* lay in economic and political domains, while education was only a part of a bigger system and gained little attention (Lauglo, 1988). Since classical Marxism provided little theoretical or practical ground to develop a viable political strategy to advance the *proletariat* revolution in the multi-ethnic Russian empire, Vladimir Lenin, the founding father of the Soviet state, placed national policy at the center of the Bolshevik Party's agenda (Dewitt, 1968; Uburia, 2015). Hence, in order to legitimize and institutionalize formal all-Union and national identity concepts, this initiative was supported by a number of policies, such as the demarcation of Soviet territories, administrative, linguistic, and cultural *korenizatsiia* (literary, rooting) policies, and the Union-wide census in 1926 (Ubiria, 2015).

Consistent with the Marxist-Leninist ideology, Soviet rulers view education as an essential component of the socio-political and economic modernization of nations. Advancing education during this period encompassed not only the eradication of illiteracy among the adult

population but also a political campaign against the elements of the "traditional" or "bourgeois" society, popularizing the regime into masses and indoctrinating new belief systems and economic initiatives (Dave, 2007; Dewitt, 1968; Fitzpatrick, 2002; Hirsch, 2004; Sembayev, 1962; Ubiria, 2015). Hence, in order to strengthen the position of Soviet rule in the region, it was vital to impose upon people the idea that Soviet power is not the continuation of Russian imperialism but an indigenous and unbiased new government that serves the national interests of Soviet citizens (Ubiria, 2015).

Such institutionalization came along with rapid industrialization, urbanization, and more "civilized" Soviet citizenry with absolute disregard for the socio-cultural features of the nomadic population. The years of "great Soviet transformations" came at a high human cost in Kazakhstan due to the "not 'natural' development of history" (Kassymbekova & Chokobaeva, 2021, p. 487). Political, economic, and socio-cultural initiatives, such as the abrupt suspension of nomadic lifestyle during the forced sedentarism, collectivization, dekulakization (liquidation of *kulaks*, referring to affluent peasants, as a class), dispossession policies, several *juts* (mass death of livestock) due to harsh winters, massive agricultural and industrial programs with crop failures in some regions, left the titular nation of KASSR[1] with no means of survival (Auanasova, 2012; Cameron, 2018; Dave, 2007; Kozlov, 2014; Romashkina, 2019; Ubiria, 2015; Viola, 2010). Moreover, the mass migration of different nations, especially Slavic peasants, into the steppes added to the changes in ethnic composition in the territory of Kazakhstan (Cameron, 2018; Dave, 2007; Ubiria, 2015).

The chapter consists of the following sections: the literature review introduces the Soviet education system with regard to the political, economic, and socio-cultural changes during the 1920s; the methodology details the archival research that was conducted and the research question on how early education system in Soviet Kazakhstan reflected the policies to develop Soviet citizenry. The findings and discussion section has two main directions, such as general information about the education

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[1] In 1920, Kazakhstan was part of the Kirghiz Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic, and in 1925, the Kazak(h) Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic was created. The author uses the "KASSR" abbreviation for both periods.

system and liquidation of illiteracy in the 1920s and poverty and *polit-prosvet* (political enlightenment), and the conclusion sums up the chapter by supporting the argument on the role of the educational system in Soviet Kazakhstan to build a Soviet citizen.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education policies in the early Soviet period reflected populist democratic values of "free development of personality", "free development of the post-revolutionary masses", and "free education for all" (Lauglo, 1988, pp. 288–289). The main direction of the initiatives was predominantly focused on promoting education in native languages and authorizing religious education to avoid resistance from Muslim parents (Lauglo, 1988; Smith, 1997). Undoubtedly, such egalitarian intentions and commitment of the ruling class played a substantial role in gaining the political support of non-Russian nationalities. However, by the beginning of the 1920s and the next decades, it was alleged to lead to another domination of local bourgeois and the elevation of "national unity over class struggle" (Smith, 1997, p. 289). Most of the initial "revolutionary enthusiasms" remained as intentions, and the beginning of the 1920s was marked by the bureaucratization and centralization of the education system that was "dedicated to the Communist cause" (Lauglo, 1988, p. 293). The "Declaration on a unified labor school" published in 1918 emphasized the main principle of Soviet pedagogy as the connection of the school with political ideology (Bogachev & Zakharova, 2015). The Education Act issued in 1923 paved the foundation for the political control of education, such as state monopoly of educational establishments, "politicizing the teaching force", adjusting the education system to the "economic needs for manpower", and strengthening the influence and position of administrative authorities and local Party bodies (Lauglo, 1988, p. 294). The government expected "social mobility through education" (p. 8), where schools "must train Soviet citizens, freed from the prejudices of religion and understanding of the meaning of class war, the legitimacy of the revolution and the goals of the Soviet state" for there were "no 'neutral' facts to be learned in social sciences" (Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 18).

The Sovietization of people was supposed to be carried out on key fronts of a complex educational system, such as "enlightenment (*prosveshchenie*), education (*obrazovanie*), and upbringing (*vospitanie*)" (David-Fox, 2016, p. 4). In Kazakhstan, the Constituent Congress of the

Soviets of the KASSR, which opened on October 4, 1920, in Orenburg, adopted the "Declaration of the Rights of the Workers of the KASSR" to provide "workers, poor peasants, and the entire mass of the working "Kirghiz"[2] people with the opportunity of a complete, widespread and free education" (Sembayev, 1962, p. 36). Undoubtedly, the challenges of the educational system during this period were vast. Firstly, only a limited number of schools existed at the beginning of the 1920s, and they lacked not only programs and basic literature but also a shortage of human and material resources to "build Soviet citizens" on a large scale. The existing professionals in the technical areas were highly mistrusted by the Communist Party due to being considered "bourgeois", and the poor educational system was not yet producing the new Soviet technical *intelligentsia* to meet the economic ambitions of the Soviets (Bailes, 2015).

Secondly, the period was marked by active theoretical research and the development of school curricula and methods of teaching disciplines. For example, in 1924, the State Scientific Council (GUS) gave instructions for training skills (*navyki*) that "closely [link] with the study of the real world"; hence, reading, writing, arithmetic, or languages were "no longer to be taught as separate subjects", leaving teachers "completely bewildered" (Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 20). This labor *(trudovoi)* method of teaching is supposed to be imparted under three directions: Nature (includes physics, chemistry, and biology), Labor (covers various historical information about labor production), and Society (encompasses history and literature) (Fitzpatrick, 2002). The First All-Union Congress of Teachers in January 1925 noted that this method was incompatible with the assimilation of deep knowledge by students, and by the 1927–1928 academic year, the leadership of the People's Commissariat of Education (*NarKomPross*) presented a list of systematic courses in grammar, spelling, and arithmetic (Bogachev & Zakharova, 2015).

And thirdly, the Soviet pursuit of "rapid construction of socialism" led to the dramatic decline of nomads' only means of livelihood—livestock (Cameron, 2018; Romashkina, 2019). Together with *juts*, the summer drought with swarming locusts in 1921 forced exhausted people to wander to bigger areas in search of survival. Dire poverty

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[2] Initially, the term "Kirghiz" was used by Russian ethnographers to generally designate steppe nomads. In 1925, the term "Kazak" started being used to differentiate Kazakhs as a separate ethnic group and only with the creation of Kazakh SSR in 1936 was the final consonant "kh" officially adopted (Dave, 2007; Ubiria, 2015).

and widespread hunger in the region stood sorely in need of provisions, basic commodities, and medications: Kazakhs lived in dilapidated buildings and barns; ate roots, oats, carrion, and grass (Romashkina, 2019; Sembayev, 1962). These all resulted in rising mortality and fast-spreading typhus, lice, and other epidemics among steppe nomads, with about more than two million starving people, which consisted half of the population of KASSR (Auanasova, 2012; Cameron, 2018; Dave, 2007; Kozlov, 2014; Romashkina, 2019; Ubiria, 2015; Viola, 2010). In addition to the economic hardships, the educational leadership of KASSR faced an escalating number of orphaned, sick, and wandering kids on the streets, while having a limited budget and a small number of buildings for schools (Aubakirova, 2020; Sembayev, 1962). Moreover, in the 1920s, the social status or political affiliation of parents was extremely important to children's enrollment in educational establishments. Whether their parents were labeled as working class or *kulaks* affected their entrance to secondary and higher education, eligibility to the *Pioneer* or *Komsomol* youth divisions of the Communist Party, and employment opportunities (Fitzpatrick, 2002). Therefore, "when accepting children, priority is given to orphans, children of workers, Red Army soldiers, and the poorest peasants" (Fund 81, Case 1333, p. 11), stressing that by being an orphan, children had better chances to obtain education rather than having your parents labeled as *kulaks*.

This "transformative" path of the Kazakh nation later was described by L. Brezhnev in the newspaper *"Kazakhstanskaya Pravda"* on August 29, 1970: "…from starvation, darkness, illiteracy, to a remarkable rise of a unique national in form, socialist in content culture - such is the rapid path of modern Kazakhstan" (as cited in Suzhikov, 1972, p. 7).

Methodology

I conducted archival research on primary sources in the Central State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Two research assistants helped me with data collection during the summer of 2022 and gathering literature and official documents, such as protocols, decrees, and acts in the sphere of educational policies issued by the KASSR from 1920 to 1930. Due to the abundance and complexity of archive documents, I spent two weeks with a research assistant in Almaty to select and conceptualize the documents necessary for the project. As a result, the main source of information for the chapter is the Archive Fund N81 from 1920 to 1936.

Generally, 43 cases[3] were studied to answer the research question: to what extent did the education system in early Soviet Kazakhstan reflect the policies intended to develop Soviet citizenry?

Findings and Discussion

The main government body working with the development of Soviet education in Kazakhstan was the *KazNarKomPros* (People's Commissariat of Education in KASSR), founded in 1920 on the basis of the Kirghiz Military-Revolutionary Committee (Sembayev, 1962). At the beginning of the 1920s, schools in the KASSR were built in four main areas: a) first-level schools with four-year education; b) seven-year schools, consisting of first-stage education followed by three-year education, after which students entered technical schools or working faculties; c) schools of the second stage (nine years), after which students can enter higher education; and d) working faculties for working and peasant youth (Fitzpatrick, 2002; Sembayev, 1962).

Despite the trying time, the ideological and political propaganda in the early Soviet period was robust. Accusations for any underdevelopment were blamed on the imperial regime or the "backwardness" of Kazakhs, by overstressing the "cultural backwardness" for being *bespis'mennye narody* (people without scripts) (Dave, 2007). Therefore, raising literacy level and political enlightenment as the basis of the educational system was almost always stressed in the Commissariat meetings:

> It would be the greatest short-sightedness to ignore [education] because only it can provide us with the real administering of all human material in the sense of its physical and mental preparation for the great duty of the builders of communism. (Fund 81, Case 1333, p. 7)

As a result, the education system of the 1920s was mostly marked by eliminating illiteracy, political propaganda, and theoretical searches and experiments in indoctrinating "foreign" ideology in accordance with Marxist-Leninism.

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[3] The cases' numbers are: 446, 452, 500, 551, 552, 553, 555, 556, 562, 569, 589, 595, 600, 604, 605, 607, 610, 642, 681, 818, 928, 982, 988, 1018, 1149b, 1149v, 1151, 1187, 1209,1260, 1263,1266, 1333, 1341, 1342, 1346, 1347, 1348, 1350, 1428, 1417, 1616, 1430.

The General State of the Educational System in the 1920s and the Liquidation of Illiteracy

The overall literacy rate in the KASSR at the beginning of the 1920s did not exceed 2% (Sharipov, 1960).

> In terms of literacy, the KASSR is the most backward suburbs: the indigenous population of the Kirghiz Republic is especially striking in its backwardness, where the percentage of illiterates reaches 95.9%. (Fund 81, Case 562, p. 19)

However, the education system in the 1920s was not only about learning to read or write. It carried a complex and genuinely new ideological agenda to people and was complicated by the economic and social conditions in the republic. Generally, despite the grandiose plans and goals, the education system could barely keep up the pace of industrialization or collectivization policies.

> The reasons for school declines are in the economic state of the region, which continues to be in a strong decline. This decline can be judged from the main branches of the economy - agriculture and cattle breeding, which decreased in 1923 - the first by 58%, the second by 87%. The restoration of these foundations of life after the imperialist and civil wars, and especially after the juts and famine, is proceeding slowly. (Fund 81, Case 551, p. 15)

Is it noteworthy that in the early Soviet period, the educational system of the KASSR was the subject of massive debates. The Kazakh intelligentsia, which was educated on the principles of the Alash Party's ideology (socio-political and national liberation movement), retained an influence on the most important branches of the cultural construction of Kazakhstan, such as designing textbooks, methodological guidance, and initiatives in developing language problems (Sembayev, 1962). During the first All-Kazakh Conference, officials stated that regardless of classes, a school should be a "product of a society" and stressed the importance of the absence of coercion and authority, and the "natural development of children" (Sembayev, 1962, p. 65). Hence, an ideological confrontation around the "cultural revolution" unfolded the "bourgeois nationalists" who "tried to tear the Kazakh people away from the culture and science of the great Russian people", calling such changes a "method of Russification of the Kazakh language and writing" and "falsify[ing] the history

of the Kazakh literature by calling them folklore" (Sembayev, 1962, pp. 161–162). Moreover, such statements from Kazakh officials went against the main political philosophy in the region, where education was determined by the economic system, the class or classless structure of society, the accepted system of upbringing, and its spiritual and ideological conditions. As a result, the Central Committee of the Communist Party in the resolution of August 5, 1929, "On the leading cadres of public education", proposed to pay special attention to cleaning public education bodies from ideological alien elements which distort the *proletarian* class line (Sembayev, 1962). Such initiatives affected the narratives in public documents over the justification of the "righteousness" of a "new" system:

> The school of the pre-revolutionary period of Kazakhstan in the hands of the tsarist government was an instrument of oppression, enslavement and Russification of the Kazakh people. (Fund 81, Case 1209. p. 47)
>
>   The education of the pre-revolutionary period serves as a lesson in how not to enlighten the masses. At that time, the entire system worked out in a way to educate the population as devoted servants of the ruling system. In the old schools, love of God, devotion to the Tsar and the Fatherland, and the upbringing of patriotic feelings were put at the forefront of education. After the October Revolution, an opportunity arose to expand [the education system]. As a result, a number of new cultural and educational institutions are being opened: namely: preschool and political [enlightening] educational institutions. (Fund 81, Case 1333, p. 12)

Certainly, since "opposing" proposals did not serve the main political course of the Soviet Union, they were suppressed from the very beginning and later "eliminated" during the Great Purges in the 1930s.[4]

> In order to exclude the independent development and conduct of campaigns, the Political Educational Agencies should strive to fill the activities of all disputed points of education in political enlightenment. For this, both the general plan of agitation work and the plans of individual campaigns should be approved by the party committees and should be made the subject of discussion of the workers of the club, libraries, etc. (Fund 81, Case 562. p. 35)

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[4] Also known as the Great Terror—a brutal political campaign to eliminate real or potential rivals or critics of Joseph Stalin and his regime.

Moreover, at the beginning of the 1920s, the education system did not have a regulated organization of academic work. Schools had no fixed procedures about the beginning or end of the school year, the length of winter and summer holidays, or the length of the school day. The average duration of the school year of schools in settled areas was 130 days, in semi-nomadic regions 110 days, and in nomadic ones, 95 days. Thus, one of the distinguishing factors of the second half of the 1920s was the regulation of the duration of the academic year. In 1926, the Council of People's Commissars of the KASSR adopted the "Charter of the Labor School of the Kazakh ASSR", where the academic year was defined as 8 months (Sembayev, 1962). Moreover, the *KazNarKomPros* gradually started to regulate common academic plans, textbooks, and methodological guidelines, but the availability and quality of Kazakh-language textbooks remained problematic until the end of the 1920s.

> Noting the grave shortage of textbooks and political educational literature, especially in the Kirghiz language. Without it, no work in the field of Public Education is possible. Hence Congress instructs to urgently find possible funds for setting up a Kirghiz publishing house. (Fund 81, Case 607, p. 67)

Nevertheless, education became not only "a new survival skill" (Dave, 2007, p. 42) but also widely valued by Kazakh nomads. Sembayev (1962) writes that a big number of young people gradually started to arrive at educational institutions from the most remote *auls* (nomad settlements which later acquired the meaning of "village") and the reception room of the Kazakh Central Executive Committee's chairman was constantly filled with newcomers.

> Here, the reporting materials of GuboNO (Provincial Department of Public Education) provide extremely encouraging news. Kustanai (now Kostanay) region, listing the insufficiently active attitude of Soviet and professional organizations (for a number of objective reasons), claims that the main assistant in the development and strengthening of public education is the population itself, which has realized the expediency and necessity of this matter and provides not only moral but also material support, expressed in the construction and repair of school buildings, free fuel supply, etc. (Fund 81, Case 982, p. 1)

Reports show that Soviet endeavors of the liquidation of illiteracy and elimination of the titular nation's "backwardness" as a first step in "building communism" and "civilized Soviet citizenry" stumbled upon the inability to provide a building and basic furniture. Schools in *auls* had no furniture or equipment, a piece of rusted iron replaced the blackboard, and children sat crossing their legs around the common "Asian" (ground) table on dirt floors covered with a felt mat (Sembayev, 1962).

> As it can be seen from the reports, the condition of school buildings everywhere is unsatisfactory, and in the Kirghiz ones – catastrophic. Based on the materials of the Semipalatinsk and Aktobe regions, work in Kirghiz schools takes place in dugouts with windows covered with rags. And this is not typical only for the two specified provinces. A school without windows is not uncommon; they are observed everywhere where the population has not taken care of their maintenance. (Fund 81, Case 562, p. 50)

Universal coverage of education and success in the liquidation of illiteracy is often regarded as one of the grand accomplishments of the Soviet Union—yet little is known about the financial and material assistance of the local population and national solidarity in the educational development of the country. For example, during the hungry 1920s, workers of Vernensk garment industrial enterprises sewed clothes and bed linen for children in orphanages, while local communities undertook responsibilities for school construction and equipment (Sembayev, 1962).

> Lack of buildings - 70.5%. Mass construction of school buildings, if any, is carried out only by the forces and means of the population itself. But this construction initiative of the population is definitely not taken into account (Fund 8, Case 982, p. 30).
>   Akmola GuboNO reports that people themselves provide great assistance to rural schools. At their own expense, they repaired buildings and classroom furniture, and procured fuel and lighting. School furniture is also purchased by the population itself. Locals assigned an accommodation to the Head of the school and hired guards for schools. Rural public organizations also provide a great deal of assistance to schools. If we do not count [their] help, the situation of schools in terms of educational and operational expenses would be very tragic. (Fund 81, Case 982, p. 1)

However, such assistance from the population did not mean they could influence the course or content of literacy programs. For example, since

in the 1920s, religious beliefs strongly prevailed among the population, confessional schools received greater esteem and influence among the steppe nomads. For instance, in 1922, the *NarKomPros* of the Turkestan ASSR issued a directive allowing the teachings of the Muslim faith in Kazakh, Uzbek, and Uighur schools, if it is the will of the people (Sembayev, 1962). The directive was halted from the beginning as the antithesis of modernity and Soviet "non-religious education" initiative in schools started to be replaced by "anti-religious education" with opposing doctrine of the Marxist-Leninist ideology on nature and society.

> In the Ural province, there were attempts by the population to create a private school with a religious bias, but they were stopped at the very beginning. Thus, a connection with modernity began to be established. (Fund 81, Case 562, p. 50)

Evidently, *likpunkts* (offices for liquidation of illiteracy) came with ideological "stuffing". For example, the Program for *Likpunkts* and Schools of the Illiterate states that during the first month, they study differences between socialist, federal, and Soviet states; the second month is all about the official bodies of the Soviet Union and the importance of their duties; the third month is dedicated to the separation of religion from the state and school and eradication of "traditional prejudices"; during the fourth month, children study about the restoration of the economy, Soviet farms, industrialization, and agriculture (Fund 81, Case 562, p. 53); the fifth month is an introduction to the New Economic Policy and the economic dependence of other states and wars between capitalist countries; the sixth month focuses on the dictatorship of the *proletariat*, the need for an international comradeship of workers, and the global role of the Soviet Republic (Fund 81, Case 607, p. 2).

Poverty and Politprosvet

At the beginning of the 1920s, the cultivated agricultural area decreased by 40% (in the Ural region up to 70%) (Sembayev, 1962) and statistics show that the Ural province estimated that up to 99% were suffering from starvation, 80% in the Orenburg province, 74.5% in the Kostanay province, and 40% in the Akmola province (Romashkina, 2019). This and former mentioned adversities at the beginning of the 1920s directly affected the educational works in the republic:

> The financial situation of Kirghiz students is in terrible condition. Being children of starving parents, having less training, and not always fluent in Russian, Kirghiz students are deprived of opportunities and have to drag out a miserable existence, [that] hardly supports their lives and certainly affects their academic success. The struggle for a piece of bread distracts students from direct work, forcing them to carry hard physical labor, instead of "gnaw granite of science. (Fund 81, Case 562, p. 16)

By January 1922, there were 333,043 homeless and orphaned children (Karsakova et al., 2018), and more than 400,000 by November of the same year (Romashkina, 2019). Demographic losses of the KASSR mostly had an ethnic character, consisting mainly of Kazakhs and estimated in Kostanay province at 37.6%, Akmola province at 23.7%, Ural province at 22.9%, Bukei province at 14.6%, and Orenburg province at 18.1% (Aubakirova, 2020). The educational administration of the republic started to organize nutrition points in the rural area to stop the flow of starving children to the city, since "the army of homeless, half-dressed, and often sick children, who are now in cities, flooding their streets, living in destroyed buildings, bazaars, near railway stations and require assistance" (Fund 81, Case 562, p. 16).

Although larger settlements used requisitioned buildings, the influx of homeless (street) children aggravated the shortage of buildings. Consequently, allocating more buildings to orphanages and providing material and financial support for starving children became one of the central errands of political enlightenment works:

> If social education accounts for 86% of expenditures on public education, political enlightenment 8%, and professional education 5.6%, then, in fact, orphanages take up to 58.5% of the allocations of social welfare. (Fund 81, Case 562, p. 50)

Due to the catastrophic events, among all the tasks that were assigned to *KazNarKomPros*, the Commissariat at the beginning of the 1920s was able to fulfill only the abolition of religious education and the introduction of joint training (Sembayev, 1962). Since the deployment of school networks in its scope and plans did not meet the material and human resource capabilities of the republic, *KazNarKomPros* and local authorities began to reduce the number of schools. Thus, the average decrease in schools in 1921/22 amounted to 60%, and in the Kostanay region, even to 86% (Sembayev, 1962). Moreover,

> The number of schools operating by January 1, 1922, had decreased by almost 70% compared to the previous year. The state issued such an insignificant loan, which can only support about 300 teachers. (Fund 81, Case 516, p. 25)

In 1922, the 10th All-Russian Congress of Soviets pointed out that the cause of general public education should be continued to develop, since "further retreat in the front of enlightenment is unacceptable" (Sembayev, 1962, p. 80). Therefore, the Congress allocated land plots to schools, assigned state subsidies, allowed a temporary measure of payment for education in schools of the 1st and 2nd levels, and permitted the opening of schools on contractual terms with the population (at people's expense). Up until the end of the 1920s, the shortage of school buildings was being solved by confiscated premises of *kulaks* or renting facilities. Together with such plans, the Central Committee proceeded to advance their ideological agenda and sometimes even incongruous proposals to fight adversities. Agitators who worked in villages and cities not only called for giving away surpluses but also the redistribution of seeds and the maintenance of the remains of livestock on a collective basis (Romashkina, 2019). An extract from the newspaper "Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic" with the title "Regulations on the All-Russian Bureau of Industrial Propaganda" stated:

> The agitation department offers everyone to send in 2 copies of all material that can be used in relation to the famine of 1921. Materials: posters, diagrams, leaflets, individual articles, photographs, reports of counties and volosts, etc; materials on the seizure of valuables, on the fight against theft. (Fund 81, Case 500, p. 1)
>
> Likpunkts should carry out talks and readings of newspaper articles about ways to combat the consequences of the famine. The next issue of "Down with Illiteracy" magazine will be entirely dedicated to the ongoing campaign. (Fund 81, Case 500, p. 12)

In the second half of the 1920s, ideological propaganda and political enlightenment in schools became even more serious. There was no school in the republic that did not conduct works on the formation of a "new Soviet citizen" (Sembayev, 1962). Propaganda works were conducted both during the classes and extracurricular activities. Many schools practiced organizing "Club days" dedicated to visits to nearby *auls* to carry out staging performances for the population, discussions

about the revolution from a Marxist-Leninist perspective, and disseminating the Communist Party's policies on the class struggle against *kulaks* and the collectivization of agriculture in the KASSR (Sembayev, 1962). Additionally, the government introduced the self-government of students *(detskoye samoupravlenie)*, where a School Council of students gathered complaints *(donosy)*, and established their own police and court divisions to "regulate" undisciplined children. In a word, "Soviet children developed political consciousness mainly by observing and imitating the adult world" (Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 24; Sembayev, 1962).

In sum, having taken power over the country, the Bolsheviks pursued a fundamentally different state policy in the field of education and in a few decades built a universal Soviet education system. Through *likpunkts* and schools, educational content mostly glorified the Soviet Union, integrated the communist ideology into all spheres of society through a "revolution in the mass consciousness", and raised the younger generation in the spirit of the professed ideals of common Soviet identity.

Conclusion

In the pursuit of communism through abrupt and rapid "transformations" toward socialism, the Soviet administration overlooked the socio-cultural and economic features of the region. The result came at a high human cost and altered ethnic composition in the KASSR, making the titular nation an ethnic minority in their own country. Arguably, after the October Revolution, former imperial regions received unprecedented equal opportunities for obtaining education and profession. But this opportunity was based on a highly politicized and fixed "scientific" knowledge of the Marxist-Leninist dogmas. Eventually, the Central Committee, by labeling opposing concepts as "anti-Soviet" or "bourgeoisie", achieved their goal of "imposing their own narrowly utilitarian approach to science teaching, not because it was pedagogically superior, but rather because they argued forcefully that it was the only approach that is ideologically suitable for an education system rooted in Soviet principles" (Weiner, 2006, p. 73).

As a result, the fundamental feature of the educational system in the 1920s was to design educational plans, methodologies, and curricula with the ideals of "productive work" in building a bright future, which brought education and knowledge to "pure vocationalism" (Weiner, 2006, p. 96) and training citizens loyal to the regime. The very notion of "education"

in the 1920s was abandoned from the pedagogical lexicon and replaced by the concept of "social upbringing". The Soviet school was a communist experiment to train children, whose personalities were just being formed, in the spirit of Soviet patriotism and proletarian internationalism. This legacy continues to affect the debates around national identity in contemporary Kazakhstan.

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CHAPTER 3

The Right to Education of Children Affected by Nuclear Tests in the Semipalatinsk Region, Kazakhstan (1991–2021)

Aigerim Mussabalinova

INTRODUCTION

Ensuring the right to education for children with disabilities remains a challenge in Central Asian countries due to the Soviet legacy of separating children with disability from their peers and education in special educational institutions or boarding schools (Makoelle, 2020; Makoelle & Burmistrova, 2021; Rollan & Somerton, 2021). Despite the effort made by parents of children with disabilities to include their children in state schools, the resistance of teachers remains strong due to the Soviet legacy of special education and the lack of knowledge of the state school teachers on how to teach children with special educational needs (Lapham & Rouse, 2013; Makoelle & Burmistrova, 2021). There is a different dynamic in the implementation of inclusive education from state to state in Central Asia due to little or no understanding among the general public

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and educational professionals on the concept of inclusive education or how to develop it (Lapham & Rouse, 2013; Makoelle, 2020).

This chapter focuses on the right to education of children affected by nuclear tests in the Semipalatinsk region, Kazakhstan, namely how this right is ensured, and whether special measures are taken as a part of reconciliation processes after the closure of the nuclear testing site in the region in 1991. Special attention to the needs of children in education is explained by the historical, cultural, political, and economic aspects of a particular region. The Semipalatinsk region serves as an example where children have special educational needs due to the legacy of nuclear testing and subsequent economic and political crises following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, it is important to explore how three decades after gaining independence, efforts have been made to address the health issues of the population affected by nuclear radiation and the special educational needs (SEN) of affected children.

The inhabitants of the Semipalatinsk region (Northeast of Kazakhstan) were exposed to nuclear tests for 50 years between 1949 and 1989, as the Soviet authority selected this region as a test site for nuclear weapons. Although the exact number of nuclear bombs that were detonated is unknown, according to one source, around 450 nuclear and thermonuclear bombs were tested: 30 on the surface, 86 into the atmosphere, and the rest underground (Werner & Purvis-Roberts, 2006). All information regarding nuclear tests was hidden from ordinary people. All actions were controlled by the military-industrial complex and reported to Moscow directly. The military not only managed and controlled the nuclear weapons tested but also its impact on people's health, animals, and nature (Atchabarov, 2002; Kassenova, 2022; Werner & Purvis-Roberts, 2006). According to existing data, more than 20,000 people went examined in the special medical organization known as 'Anti-Brucellosis Dispensary Number Four', and approximately 1.6 million people received abnormal doses of radiation (Kassenova, 2022; Werner & Purvis-Roberts, 2006). That was the human price for keeping peace between the USA and USSR in the Cold War. This price is still growing as the impact of radiation continues to affect the following generations.

Just before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and 1990, during the national campaign against nuclear testing in the region, politicians and civil activists of the Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement argued against nuclear testing because of the adverse impact of radiation on people's health. However, it played negatively on the people's psyche and fostered

radiophobia and stigma against people of the region (Atchabarov, 2002; Kassenova, 2022; Stawkowski, 2016). The closure or renunciation of the use of nuclear weapons was the ideal international agenda for the newly independent Kazakhstan (Kassenova, 2022). As mentioned above, the paradox is that those vocal about this issue were the same people in power who silently observed these explosions during Soviet times. In 1997, the Semipalatinsk oblast[1] was merged into the East-Kazakhstan oblast and remained as such until 2022. Therefore, there is no separate data available on the ex-Semipalatinsk oblast for the last 25 years on education or health matters.

This chapter presents the findings of the research that aimed to explore the context of ensuring the right to education of children with SEN in the Semipalatinsk region. In particular, this chapter addresses whether the rights to education of children affected by radiation are respected in post-conflict Semipalatinsk region. The main argument of this study is that the special educational needs of children affected by radiation are not fulfilled as part of reconciliation or rehabilitation measures, so there is a missing generation of children with SEN in the region.[2] This chapter starts with reviewing existing knowledge delineating the theoretical framework and outlining the methodology. Then, findings and discussion are presented. In the end, it provides the conclusion and recommendations.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Education, Social Justice, and Post-conflict Contexts

The term inclusive education emerged in the domestic law on education in 2011. As presented in Table 3.1, the definition of inclusive education has changed several times in the last ten years, and only in 2021, it was extended from education for children with special educational needs due to health issues (medical approach) to education for all children with special educational needs.

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[1] According to the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan On Administrative-Territorial Division of the Republic of Kazakhstan (1993), a region is a part of the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan, including several settlements while the oblast consists of cities of regional significance and districts. Region and oblast can be used interchangeably.

[2] In this paper, the missing generation of children means children of the Semipalatinsk region who passed away due to radiation-related diseases, and children who were excluded from society due to underdevelopment, lack of socialization, and isolation.

Table 3.1 Definition of "inclusive education" and "persons with special educational needs" in legal documents in the period 2011–2021

The law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on amendments and additions to the Law on education (2011)	The law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on amendments and additions to certain legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on issues of expanding the academic and managerial independence of higher educational institutions (2018)	The law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on amendments and additions to certain legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on inclusive education (2021)
Inclusive education—joint training and education of persons with disabilities, providing equal access with other categories of students to the relevant educational curricula, correctional pedagogical and social support for development through the provision of special conditions	Inclusive education—a process that provides equal access to education for all students, taking into account special educational needs and individual opportunities	The definition of inclusive education remains the same as it was in 2018
The definition of special educational needs was not provided	Persons (children) with special educational needs—persons who experience permanent or temporary difficulties in obtaining education due to health, in need of special, general education curricula and educational programs of additional education	Persons (children) with special educational needs—persons (children) who experience permanent or temporary needs in special conditions for obtaining education of the appropriate level and additional education

The practice is different from the law on paper. Although there are changes in language about inclusive education, pre-service teacher preparation is still based on 'defectology' which is the special education discipline that was taught in the Soviet time, and which is based on the medical approach to support children (Makoelle & Burmistrova, 2021). The Soviet legacy of special education overshadows inclusive education as there are not enough teachers trained to work with children with SEN and current teachers in the state schools and preschool organizations are resistant to inclusive education, perhaps due to the lack of educational materials for children with SEN, and training and guidelines for

teachers for working with children with SEN (Makoelle, 2020; Mussa-balinova & Polat, 2023). Therefore, in Kazakhstan, inclusive education remains a goal while the majority of children with disability attend special educational organizations (see Fig. 3.1).[3]

Therefore, reforms are not efficient in changing teachers' and parents' mentality and eliminating the stigma against children with SEN (Makoelle, 2020; Makoelle & Burmistrova, 2021; Nogaibaeva et al., 2017). The system is more agency and resources-oriented when the children's needs are adapted to the available region's resources. In Kazakhstan, the non-governmental sector plays a crucial role in the development of inclusive education and brings innovative, inclusive practices

■ Total number of children with developmental disabilities aged 7-18 per region
■ The number of children with developmental disabilities who attended inclusive schools (classes) per region
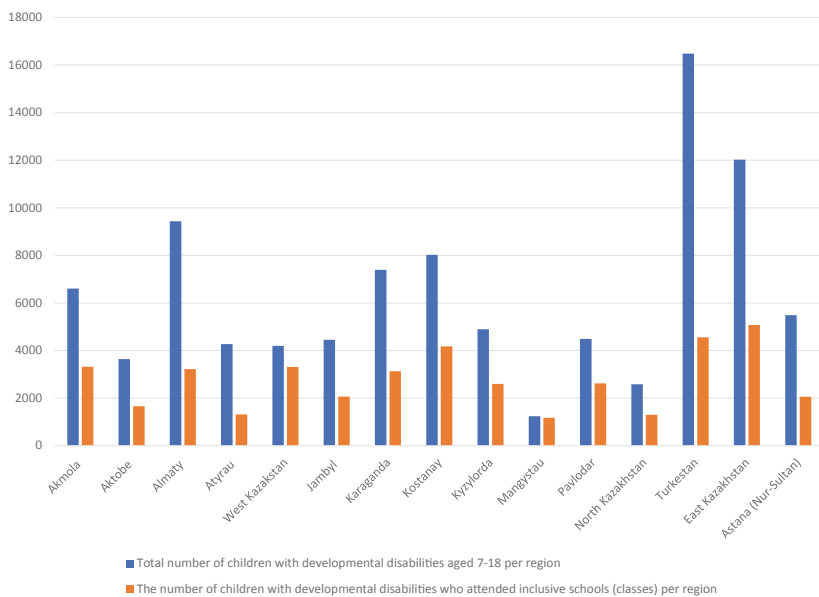
Fig. 3.1 Number of children who attended inclusive schools (classes) in Kazakhstan, 2021 (*Source* National educational database, 2021)

[3] Regarding the Semipalatinsk oblast, currently called the Abai oblast, the education data is available partially, mostly as a part of the East Kazakhstan region where the Abai region was included until 2022. The last available data is from 2021, so there is no separate data yet on the Abai region.

to the state education (Rollan & Somerton, 2021), but this practice is fragmented and not sustainable. Consequently, there are missing children with SEN due to a shortage of available services for parents and children with SEN from the beginning of the child's life (Haar, 2022). School age starts from 6 to 7 years when a child must attend an educational organization in Kazakhstan. It is a time when those children with developmental delays who did not attend any early childhood educational organizations, and whose parents did not notice such delays, are recognized. Then, if there is no space at a special school or no special school exists in the city or village, a child with SEN is more likely to be recommended for home-schooling or boarding school. Therefore, isolation, separation from family, and stigma against children in Kazakh society remain strong among professionals and the rest of the population. In addition to this, people of the Semipalatinsk region live with radiophobia which is a social phenomenon constructed as the outcome of the campaign to close the nuclear test site (Atchabarov, 2002; Stawkowski, 2016, 2017).

According to the law 'On social protection of citizens affected by nuclear tests at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site' (1992) and following regulations, the victims and current citizens of the region are eligible for (1) one-time paid financial compensation; (2) additional payment to a pension; (3) additional payment to salary for those who work and live in the region; (4) additional vacancy days for those who work and live in the region; (5) additional maternity leave; and (6) rehabilitation and medical treatment for adults and children if their disease is caused by radiation. These legislative measures were, however, nominal, lacked transparency, were postponed several times, and the amount of payment and benefits decreased over time. The law changed 13 times between 1994 and 2022, resulting in the reduction of the benefits package and the list of diseases that enables access to medical and rehabilitation benefits. In short, benefits are not very accessible, especially for children of the current generation.[4] According to the law 'On social protection of

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[4] The list of diseases associated with exposure to ionizing radiation, and the Rules for establishing a causal relationship of diseases with exposure to ionizing radiation, was approved in 2004 and changed in 2019 and 2020 (Kazakhstan, 2004, 2019 and 2020). According to the representative of the Institute of Radiation Medicine and Ecology in the roundtable of dissemination of these research findings in February 2023, the exclusion of some diseases for children of the current generation was justified by the findings of Japanese scholars based on their experience. The question of why the local scholar's findings were ignored or new research on this topic was not conducted remained open.

citizens affected by nuclear tests at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site' (1992) and the list of diseases associated with exposure to ionizing radiation (2020), the policy related to the closure of the nuclear test site mentions nothing on education, neither on special conditions for children affected by radiation, nor on reconciliation measures, while the mental retardation is one of the diseases caused by radiation. The latter will be further discussed in the findings section.

The Framework for Analyzing Education in a Post-conflict Territory

The 4RS framework was applied as an analytical tool (Novelli et al., 2014). The flexible nature of the framework (Novelli et al., 2017) made it possible to analyze the collected data using its 4 dimensions: redistribution, recognition, representation, and reconciliation.

The 4RS framework enables the examination of the relationship between education and peacebuilding measures focusing on the 'legacies of conflict'. Equal access to education is one of the indicators of the redistribution dimension that addresses inequalities. Children affected by radiation have special educational needs in services for ensuring equal access to education. This research provides some insights regarding ensuring the right of all children to education in the region. Sustainable peacebuilding in the context of the applied framework should be conceptualized 'in and through' education. Therefore, redistributive measures in education are also signs of reconciliation if such were taken. However, addressing inequality caused by the aftermaths of nuclear testing as part of the Cold War requires first recognition of such inequality in official discourse.

Recognition and representation are interrelated dimensions. Unlike conventional indicators or the 'drivers of conflict' such as cultural, religious, language, or gender inequalities, in this research, the focus is on special educational needs caused by health and environmental issues, namely the impact of radiation on children's health and limited abilities to access education. The Semipalatinsk region was joined to the East-Kazakhstan oblast from 1997 to 2022. Therefore, the interests of the people affected by nuclear testing are barely represented in decision-making, decreasing the likelihood of their needs being recognized. Thus,

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The findings of this research suggest that there are no powerful representatives of the region to advocate their interests on the republic level.

all four dimensions of the 4RS framework are useful in analyzing data of this research and addressing the research question, although the conflict context of the Semipalatinsk region is not conventional as it was in other research where this framework was applied (Durrani & Halai, 2018; Novelli et al., 2017).

Methodology

The study uses qualitative semi-structured interviews. This method was ideal to address the research question. Practitioners, professionals, and civil activists who work with children or are related to the Nevada-Semipalatinsk social movement mentioned earlier were invited to participate in the research and share their vision of the research problem. The study received ethical approval from the University of Ulster.

Data was collected over two months, in September and October 2022. Participants were selected from four regions: Abai oblast, including villages and Semey city, Astana (capital), Almaty (ex-capital), and Karaganda (a city close to the Abai oblast). In total, 30 participants were interviewed, 13 civil activists, ten professionals from the education sphere, five medical professionals, and two social workers. Participants were recruited through official letters sent to local relevant departments within the local authority and through the author's personal network. Being originally from the region and a victim of radiation, and speaking both local languages—Kazakh and Russian—enabled the building of trust with the participants. Only five interviewees used Kazakh, while the rest spoke a mix of Kazakh and Russian. The interview length varied from fifteen minutes to almost two hours. Younger participants were brief since they had limited knowledge of the topic. Other factors inhibiting interview discussion might relate to hesitancy to speak among public workers or the lack of research culture and experience. By contrast, the pain and will to speak out all that the participants kept inside for a long time encouraged more profound discussions. The average age of the participant is 45.

All interviews were audio recorded with the written consent of the participants. The research assistant, who is a Kazakh philologist, transcribed and coded all interviews in Kazakh and some in Russian. All texts were read twice and coded according to emerging patterns. Pseudonyms were given to all participants to protect their identities.

Findings

The main finding of the research indicates that children's rights were not considered seriously in Kazakhstan, which is common in many states. However, the context of Kazakhstan is different, at least because it is a relatively new state that had to prioritize economic development. Therefore, the research problem is partially explained by the context or 'conflict drivers', which I discussed in the preceding two subsections. This structure allows readers to understand better the findings presented in the last subsection that focused on reconciliation measures and ensuring the children's right to education in the region.

Representation and Recognition Issues in the Context of the History and Culture of the Semipalatinsk Region

According to participants, the victims of the nuclear tests and their problems related to the aftermath of the nuclear tests are forgotten.

> They don't talk about the landfill at all. As if nothing had happened. They even want to give land for use … 15 years ago, a scientist was constantly publishing her works that investigated the air and the earth and that there are heavy metals in the soil, the decay of which has already begun. But then they covered it all up. I don't even know. Now they don't talk about it aloud. (Bibigul -education sphere)

One of the reasons is that many people affected by radiation are already dead; another reason is that politicians hide the problems and play with statistics to minimize the number of illnesses caused by radiation. People are tired and pessimistic, with radiophobia deep in their minds.

> The death of the closest people makes up for a time. This is probably an unfortunate example, but this is a wound since the middle of the 20th century, habituation has already occurred, and moral fatigue … Here I think that this should be a constant problem for our government .., people are tired. They cannot put forward demands if there is no agency. (Sovetkhan, civil activist)

> …we get used to people from other regions being afraid of us. They say that it is better to avoid marriage with a woman of the Semey region. Shymkent, Atyrau, Zhambyl (regions) say so. Because it will affect the future generation… (Aizhan – social protection sphere)

…After the landfill, many residents were diagnosed with cancer. In the beginning, we were all worried. (Munira - civil activist, defectologist)

Participants expressed being unheard and reiterated their will to participate in the region's development and tackling the local issues. They want to be heard as they think they know better the problems from the ground.

Everything has to be done from the bottom. Everything must be taken from the field. We must work together. (Zhannur, doctor)

Representation and recognition are interconnected dimensions. The data collected for this research shows underrepresentation and a lack of recognition of the needs of the people living in the region. The tension in the voice and the lack of trust in the government need attention and redressal before it is raised to the critical point of spilling over to open conflict.

Redistribution: Political and Economic Restrictions

The redistribution of resources and opportunities, as advocated by the 4RS framework, is the remedy for social injustice. Research participants expressed the inadequacy of state measures in such words as: 'crumbs'; 'very insignificant and miserable'; and 'seven rounds of hell'. Parents of sick children feel like they are in hell as there is nobody to help within the state, and they are running from door to door but receiving nothing. It is the story of one of the research participants whose granddaughter had to switch to home-schooling due to a diagnosis of blood cancer at age 13 and whose parents could not prove a connection with nuclear testing while parents and grandparents lived in the village not far from the nuclear test site and are victims of nuclear radiation.

Access to education for children affected by radiation assumes the existence of special state services and resources. Therefore, prior to the redistribution of resources, recognition and representation of these children and their needs are required. The latter's absence is explained by the former. The participants of this research confirmed that special needs in the education of children affected by radiation were not recognized so that there was nothing established as part of state policy to close the nuclear test site.

At the moment there is one Pedagogical medical psychological commission (PMPC).[5] We serve the population of the city of Semey, Abai district and Kurchatov ... More than 4,000 children are registered with us, in Semey 105,000 children are under 18 years old, in Kurchatov more than 70,000 children, and more than 50,000 in Abai.[6] ... at the moment the number [the queue for the consultancy] does exceed the record going two months ahead... (Perizat- education sphere)

now I hear that there is work being done regarding inclusive education, some classes [inclusive] are opening, but it was not ten -twenty years ago. (Munira, civil activists, defectologist)

... Now many [children with disability] are sitting in 4 walls [remain at home because they cannot go out, there are no services to carry them out, and they/their parents think that they are not welcome in society], and they are isolated. The system knows about these children. But, unfortunately, nothing is filled with human content [not child-centred approach]. (Rosa, civil activist)

However, in the first decade of independence of Kazakhstan, the situation was difficult due to political and economic crises in the state in general. According to one teacher, it was a time when even healthy children did not attend school. Participants shared that in the last ten years, the situation has improved in all three spheres: education, health, and social protection, as elsewhere in Kazakhstan. For example, an analysis of interviews with representatives of the education system showed that work on developing inclusive education is carried out in the region. Even in rural areas, teachers said that they develop their inclusive practice. Persons with disabilities receive wheelchairs, allowances, and social worker services at home. Social workers visit at home and work with children who the socio-medical commission recognized as incapable of studying in regular educational organizations. According to stories shared by specialists who provide social services for children with learning difficulties, working with a child at an early stage can contribute to their inclusion in the education

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[5] PMPC is the state agency that approves the SEN of the child and suggests an educational program.

[6] According to the law on social and medical and pedagogical correctional support for children with disabilities (Kazakhstan, 2002), it is suggested to have at least one PMPC for a population of 50,000 children.

system. In addition, due to the assistance provided by the social workers, parents can take their children out of home and not be ashamed of them.

Reconciliation: Children's Right to Education

The findings above demonstrate that children's rights to education in the region are fulfilled partially due to limited access to education, services, and resources. Data obtained during this research suggested that educational services are provided based on the resources that remained from the Soviet time. No investments were made to cover the special needs of children affected by radiation.

> …boarding schools are overcrowded. The boarding school at the beginning was open for children with mental retardation…Now it is filled with children who have mild mental retardation... We are trying to be selective, but still, you understand [there is not enough space]. (Bibigul –education sphere)

Although the exact number of children affected by radiation is neither provided by the official data[7] nor available in open access, one of the teachers who participated in this research confirmed their existence among the current young generation:

> We also had a study at school about four years ago. According to children's profiles, we identified that about 10 children in our school were diagnosed with a disability connected with nuclear tests. (Umyt—special school teacher)

Some participants mentioned that even when children with developmental delays or mental impairment are visited by a teacher at home[8] or attend a school, they do not learn anything as the quality of such education is low:

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[7] For more than ten requests for additional information about children affected by nuclear testing in the Semipalatinsk region, their access to education and other social services made by the author during this research to central and local authorities have not produced any response.

[8] Homeschooling in Kazakhstan means that the child is registered at school, but does not come to school, instead teachers from state school visit such child at home.

Homeschoolers receive state benefits. Even if the parents understand that the training will not give anything, they are noted that the teacher comes and they receive this allowance. The teacher came, drank tea, and left, or just signed, or just called... Now this percentage of students at home is higher.., there is no quality [quality of education]. (Perizat—education sphere)

There is a woman 40 years old in our village; she is mentally impaired, and received seven years of education at school. She can't read or write; she can only sign. I am in contact with her. She does not want to apply for pension and disability; she perceived it with hostility. Perceived as stigmatization. (Nina, civil activist)

The situation with the quality of education is worse in rural areas. As exemplified by the last quotes, the quality of education for children with special education needs is not good to the extent that children who attended school cannot read or count after seven years of school attendance. In rural areas, there are no specialists to work with children with SEN, especially with young children (under three years). Parents, having the resources, take their children daily to the city for 100 kilometers to study. In rural areas, it was also noted that there are no roads and transportation to schools for children with special educational needs. Notably, the need for additional nutrition for children has been identified. According to teachers, children are tired due to region-specific anemia and a lack of vitamins. Thus, the issue of ensuring the best interests of the child in obtaining education and communication skills remains crucial, especially in rural areas.

Due to a lack of family support, some children with disabilities are abandoned. However, having a family is important for a child's development and ensuring his or her right to education (Houston, 2017; Mendes & Ormerod, 2019; Soriano, 2005). Participants noted that if a child has a family, then the child has a better chance of staying alive and getting some kind of education. Therefore, the family, namely the parents, need support from the state. According to respondents, during the period of *perestroika* and unemployment, the antisocial behavior of parents contributed to the abandonment of children with disabilities. At the same time, the participants noted that parents are also stigmatized and therefore, although children survive and receive education, they are not always socialized, highlighting the need for supporting parents and the prevention of stigma to develop an inclusive society.

> I'm getting old; I'm losing my strength. Tomorrow my child will not be able to provide for his family. I can't earn big money because I'm attached to a child. He went to college but failed to work in his specialty; he lives on benefits… I can't trust anyone with my child. I can't let my child live without me. Perhaps this is my omission. We are attached. We are forced to be like this. Possibly, I need a psychologist. (Munira, civil activist, defectologist)

Work in this direction is underway, but there is not enough information for parents at the healthcare level. At the same time, it is noted that in rural areas, parents and children are better supported due to strong community support, while in urban locations, the work of the community is not well-developed.

Overall, the findings confirm that the region was abandoned in all spheres, including education. This was recognized by Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in September 2022 when he met with citizens of the re-established Abai oblast (ex-Semipalatinsk region). He said that 'the infrastructure of the city of Semey is extremely worn out. There is no hot water in summer, and in winter, the houses are not heated' (Kazinform, 2022). In addition, he invited local businesses to contribute to the revival of the region, including the construction of schools, medical organizations, and other social facilities (Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). In line with the President's speech, the Ministry of National Economy (2023) in January 2023 presented the development plan for the region, which included the building of six small schools, extensions to existing schools, a schoolchildren's palace, a boarding school, as well as nine kindergartens and three children's camps. Therefore, the restoration of the region's status gives hope for reconciliation measures. Ensuring children's right to education in practice requires state services that help parents to develop their children's full potential. Early diagnosis and intervention are the key measures that are not developed in Kazakhstan (Haar, 2022). The development of such services will help Kazakhstan to move away from the Soviet practice of separating children with disabilities and stigmatization to the inclusion of these children in society from early childhood. Considering the history of the ex-Semipalatinsk region, children's needs due to radiation and stigmatization should be recognized first and then addressed through access to quality, inclusive education.

Conclusion

The findings of this research demonstrate that after the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site in 1991, Kazakhstan followed a 'trickle-down' vision of peace (Castaneda, 2009, cited in Novelli et al., 2017) when the market, security, and so-called democracy were prioritized. Given the priority to the latter, Kazakhstan in the 1990s and the present day ignores the needs of children affected by radiation in practice, although on paper (in law), Kazakhstan declares compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The economic crisis in the region after the collapse of Soviet Union negatively affected people who were already suffering the consequences of radiation. Poor nutrition, poverty, and unemployment contributed to the deeper marginalization of affected children (institutionalization, low quality, or lack of education). Stigma and radiophobia among people are evidence of the lack of reconciliation measures, including engaging with education in the region and across the country. Not all children affected by nuclear tests have access to education or quality education. Therefore, there is a missing generation of those children who remained in the four walls or died in the institutions.

This research shows an underestimation of the role of education in sustainable peacebuilding. It also proved the effectiveness of the 4RS framework as an analytical tool when researching education's role in a post-conflict region. It revealed the failure of the state to meet the needs of the children affected by nuclear tests. While the problem is not recognized due to the lack of voice of representatives in decision-making, there are no redistributive or reconciliation measures adopted. For 25 years, the region and the people were neglected. As the political situation changed in 2022, the rights of the people in the region have received attention raising the hope for adopting reconciliation and redistribution measures for children affected by radiation. The post-conflict case of the region should be taken as a learning case not only for Kazakhstan but for the global community.

The political change, however, is recent and coincides with data collection. Therefore, any positive outcomes for affected people are yet to materialize. Although time constraints limited the scope of the current study, this research opens the door for other research in this realm, especially since it would be useful to conduct a quantitative comparative study

to identify the number of children with SEN related to radiation and the proportion of those who have access to education and included in society. Such research requires more time, funding, and engagement with key stakeholders and policymakers to obtain data.

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CHAPTER 4

Religion and Spirituality in Public Schools of Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

Zilola Khalilova

INTRODUCTION

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, a search for national and religious identities started in the post-Soviet countries, including Muslim-majority former Soviet republics. In the independent states of Central Asia, the role of Islam has been significant in the pursuit of ideological and national identity, particularly in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which created a vacuum (Khalid, 2014; Thibault, 2018). The practice of Islam has witnessed significant growth in the republics over the past two decades. However, due to a lack of experience and an inadequate number of qualified religious leaders, the religious communities of the Central Asian republics could not play a dominant role in this process. Instead, both moderate and radical religious circles from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the Persian Gulf states have played an active role in

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57

promoting their brand of Islam using various methods, including education, charity, and humanitarian support (Aliyev, 2004). Despite the state's tight control over religion, there has been an upsurge in radical forms of Islam, particularly in the area of religious education. Furthermore, it is important to note that the political and societal landscape in Central Asia is still significantly influenced by the seven-decade-long Soviet rule, which has left a lasting impact on the perception of religion's role in society. The strong secular legacy of the USSR has led to a limited emphasis on religious education (Thibault, 2015). On the one hand, religion is almost completely separated from the state and the educational system in Central Asia; on the other hand, the need for religious education is very high in society, especially among young people. For example, in Tajikistan, the relationship between the state and religion is moderate, and many Muslim students have pursued their studies in Pakistan. In Kyrgyzstan, Islam has been radicalized, while Christianity has become more missionary-oriented (International Crisis Group (ICG), 2003). In 2017, the subject "History of Religious Culture" was introduced into the public school curriculum in Kyrgyzstan (Topogeldiyeva, 2018), while in state schools in Kazakhstan, religious theology is not taught as a separate subject. Instead, a course on the history and culture of religion is provided. For instance, Saydumanova (2018) notes that since 2016, compulsory teaching of religious studies has been introduced in the public schools of Kazakhstan.

In 1991, the Uzbekistani Republic defined its development strategy based on international covenants and human rights conventions, and as a secular democratic state, the activities of religious institutions have been transferred to non-governmental organizations. Religion, mainly Islam, is a part of the local history, culture, and social life. Islam emerged in society not as a religious doctrine, but as a system of national spiritual values in terms of the educational impact of the development of society (Yunusova, 2002).

Religious education about religious scriptures and practices is not taught as a separate subject at public or private schools (ICG, 2003). According to the legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the inclusion of religious subjects as instruction in faith in the curriculum is prohibited, but the subjects that provide information about the morality and history and culture of world religions are allowed. Currently, public schools in Uzbekistan provide some insight into the world's religions as part of their moral course based on theology: "*Din asoslari*" [fundamentals of religion]; "*Dunyo dinlari tarixi*" [history of world religions]; "*Tarbiya*"

[upbringing]; "*Odobnoma*" [etiquette]; "*Eski uzbek yozuvi*" [old Uzbek script]; "*Adabiyot*" [literature]; "*Tarix*" [history]; "*Dunyo dinlari tarixi*" [history of world religions]; "*Vatan tuyg'usi*" [Patriotism]; "*Ma'naviyat asoslari*" [fundamentals of spirituality].

My analysis of the policy and strategies of teaching religion within public education in Uzbekistan over the last 30 years rests on archives and legal documents. This chapter seeks to answer the following questions: How has education policy in relation to religious education evolved over the last 30 years in Uzbekistan? What does the normative framework say about freedom of religion and teaching instruction in faith in public schools? Additionally, I seek to take a closer look at the position of religion in the school curriculum, particularly in terms of hours allocated to its study, the content covered, and textbooks used in courses dedicated to religious education. Finally, who has responsibility for developing curricula and the content of religious education textbooks.

Religion, State, and Society in Independent Uzbekistan

In the decades since Uzbekistan gained independence, the country has undergone a process of spiritual and educational restoration aimed at helping citizens find their own identity and develop national consciousness in line with democratic principles. Islam plays a significant role in Uzbek society, where its beliefs are intertwined with culture, ideas, ideology, child-rearing, and customs (Yunusova, 2002; Yusupov, 2015). This close relationship between Islam and society has set the standards for education for thousands of years and has served as a means of articulating a national ideology. Spirituality and religion are considered both national and cultural, while ideology and politics represent the interests of certain social groups (Abdurahmonov et al., 2001). In this regard, spirituality refers to issues related to Islamic culture and ethics in Uzbek society. The focus was on the role of Islamic traditions in educating young people in terms of national ideology (ICG, 2003; Seraphine, 2018).

In Uzbekistan, religion is officially separated from the state (article 7. The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations), although one might question if it is also separated from society (Karimov, 1996). Sunni Islam is the predominant religion in Uzbekistan, and public moral and ethical norms stem directly from Islamic teachings and play a vital role in the spiritual life of the population. Most

Muslims in Uzbekistan follow the Hanafi school of thought, known for its adaptability to local customs and rituals and recognition of scientific and technological advances (Abdurahmonov et al., 2001; Aliyev, 2004). The National Center of Human Rights reports that there are 2,323 religious organizations in the country, belonging to 16 sects, with 2,132 being Islamic and 191 being non-Islamic organizations, such as Christian, Jewish, Baha'i, Krishna Consciousness Society, and a Buddhist temple. There is also an interfaith Bible Society in the country (Tulyakov, 2023). However, there is no official registration of believers, and the Statistics Committee report does not cover which religion individuals follow. Nevertheless, the Committee of Religious Affairs (CORA) reports that 94% of the population follows Islam, with approximately 3.5% following Christian Orthodoxy and the rest following other denominations (Yusupov, 2022).

The above debates about the role of religious education notwithstanding, the field of religious education in Uzbekistan is organized in three capacities: professional religious education in the field of theology (madrasas, Tashkent Islamic Institute, seminaries); academic education in religion in secular educational institutions (including public schools and higher education) (ICG, 2003); and domestic religious education settings in which the intent is to study the rules of religious practice, which are of interest to the population and considered necessary for daily life, and to acquire knowledge based on religious views on issues related to morality. Mainly, it is provided in the family and only parents are allowed to provide religious education to their children (Komilov, 2021; Yusupov, 2017).

Conceptual Framework

There is a parallel discourse on the role religion plays in the education of a secular state in general. The question of religious education has been and still is the subject of particularly intense and controversial debate (Fratelli, 2013; , Lähnemann et al., 2009; Seligman, 2004).

Religious education about faith in public schools has an impact on society and, in some cases, plays a strong formative role. Many criteria can be used to distinguish the main solutions which have been adopted. A macro-distinction is that of a denominational vs. non-denominational approach toward religion as a specific subject in school curricula. These two different options can be named: "education into religion(s)" and "education about religion(s)" (Jackson, 2007; Schreiner, 2009).

Fratelli (2013) argued that the post-secular idea is the possibility for schools and religious organizations to learn from each other by inhabiting the same public space and participating in shared practices. Lähnemann and Schreiner (2009) argue that religious education and interreligious learning can serve as a key agent in helping people find direction in their lives and actions. Another feature of methodologies in education on religious studies is the interpretive models on which the analysis of religious phenomena and resources in the school textbooks are discussed (Seligman, 2004).

There are three types of religious education that are relevant to the study. Education in faith, i.e., how to be a pious member of your religion, education about religion, i.e., teaching world religion and moral education, which is akin to civics (Chazan, 1985).

Religious education about faith can be delivered in public school settings in two ways. Firstly, instruction in faith can be delivered to students in their own religious confession, contributing to the construction of students' religious identity and their integration into the cultural and spiritual realms to which they belong (Brandt, 2013). Furthermore, it helps and develops the ability to distinguish right from wrong, to act on this distinction and to experience pride when we do the right things and guilt when we are engaged in wrongdoings, which in turn shape one's morality. Engaging with religion can contribute to developing personal orientation and identity formation. This applies to education in religious communities as well as in public education. Secondly, religious education can offer students knowledge about religions in an informative, neutral way while equally acknowledging different religious traditions. It is evident that the majority of the population in Uzbekistan consists of Muslims. However, due to the secular nature of the state, the objective of incorporating religious education in schools is to facilitate the assimilation of religious knowledge among young individuals based on principles of diversity and tolerance. It is important to note that religious knowledge encompasses more than just faith; it can promote awareness of different worldviews, their cultural and moral implications and their contribution to human rights, and thus contribute to a tolerant attitude as a prerequisite for harmonious coexistence. In light of this concept, it becomes essential to analyze the specific elements that should be included in the educational process when teaching about religion in the context of Uzbekistan. By incorporating these elements, students can engage in reflective thinking and ultimately form their own perspectives.

Methodology

This study combines archival research with analysis of textbooks used for teaching religious education in schools. Archival research helps to see the evolution and dynamics of state policy about teaching religion in public schools. The archival findings reflect the most important features of the field for a period of 30 years between 1991 and 2022.

The analysis comprises the processing of qualitative data extracted from the school curricula, decrees, and laws and classified into several sub-categories (Halai & Durrani, 2021). Additionally, where appropriate, I use statistics in the legal documents of the government and the school curricula.

My qualitative methodology was iterative. Firstly, I identified search terms which captured the key dimensions, including religion, education, religious, political economy contexts, and conflict-affected states. Next, I searched several databases, including the National Archive of Uzbekistan (NAUz), the Archive of Republican Educational Center and electronic databases of development agencies, including the National Database of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Policy analysis uses political viability, evaluation, and equity criteria, and studies are selected for in-depth review. The extracted data is then thematized, analyzed, and synthesized to draw conclusions. This stage aims to critically and constructively relate the program-related literature with broader insights into religious education in public schools in Uzbekistan.

Findings

Legal Framework of Religious Education in Uzbekistan

The Republic of Uzbekistan is a signatory to more than 60 international legal documents in human rights (including six UN documents). In addition, it has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which specifically mention ensuring subjects such as the general history of religion and ethics are covered in public schools if provided in a neutral and objective way. The freedom of parents or legal guardians to ensure that their children receive a religious and moral upbringing that corresponds to their beliefs is related to the guarantee of freedom of religion or belief (Yunusova, 2002).

Several legislative acts have been developed to pursue its secular democratic stance (Yunusova, 2002). For example, Table 4.1 highlights several clauses related to education and religious education in the Constitution, as well as other laws and regulations that govern these areas. For example, the Constitution guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to believe in any religion or not to believe in any religion, and religious organizations are separated from the state and equal before the law. The Law on Freedom of Conscience of May 1, 1998 (new version in 1998, 2021), prohibits the inclusion of religious subjects in the curriculum of the education system (except for religious educational institutions). It should be mentioned that in accordance with international child rights norms, Article 5 of the Declaration of the UN guarantees all children "the right to education in matters of religion or belief according to the wishes of their parents", and Article 6 guarantees the right to "teach religion or belief in places suitable for this purpose". Besides that, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "On Education", recognizes the freedom to choose the form of education, non-discrimination in education, ensuring equal education opportunities, the inculcation of national and universal values in education and upbringing, and the harmony of state and public administration in the education system. This reflects a commitment to providing quality education that promotes both national and universal values, and ensuring that everyone has equal access to education regardless of their background or beliefs. However, teaching religion in public schools is not mentioned anywhere.

It appears that the Uzbekistan government has recently gone through a shift in its policies toward religion and religious education. On August 23, 2019, the government noted that it is necessary to introduce a single subject, "*Tarbiya*" (Upbringing), with a focus on educating the younger generation in the spirit of national pride and patriotism. Overall, the government appears to be prioritizing religious values and morality in education and society (Conception of curriculum "*Tarbiya*", retrieved March 2, 2023). Extensive efforts have been made to educate the populace on religious values, strongly emphasizing morality.

Religious Education as a School Subject in Public Education

The teaching of religion in educational institutions of Uzbekistan took a new turn in transition period and emphasizes the deep study and widespread promotion of moderate teachings of Islam (Nuritdinov,

Table 4.1 Legislation acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan on education and religion between 1991 and 2021

Education policy	Clauses on universal education
Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019	Article 31 of the Republic of Uzbekistan guarantees freedom of conscience and the "right to believe in any religion or not to believe in any religion" Article 18 of the Constitution generally prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, among others. Forced assimilation of religious views is not allowed Article 61 of the Constitution states, "Religious organizations and associations are separated from the state and are equal before the law" and "the state does not interfere in the activities of religious associations"
The International Congress organized by UNESCO in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 2000. (Xusniddinov, 2002)	Highlighted the importance of studying and understanding religions at all levels of education, and emphasized the role of UNESCO in promoting peace and condemning all forms of extremism and terrorism
The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations and Religious Organizations of May 1, 1998, (new versions 2008, 2021) https://lex.uz/ru/docs/-5491534	Article 7. Separation of religion from the state. In the Republic of Uzbekistan, religion is separated from the state
The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations of May 1, 1998, (new versions 2008, 2021) https://lex.uz/ru/docs/-5491534	Article 8, which is also the basis of religious education, recommends separation of the state education system in the Republic of Uzbekistan from religion and religious organizations, and prohibits the inclusion of religious subjects in the curriculum of the education system (except for religious educational institutions), is not allowed. Private religious education is prohibited

Table 4.1 (continued)

Education policy	Clauses on universal education
The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "On Education" adopted on 1997 (new version 2020) (https://lex.uz/docs/570 0831)	Recognizes the freedom to choose the form of education, non-discrimination in education, ensuring equal education opportunities, the inculcation of national and universal values in education and upbringing and harmony of state and public administration in the education system
Criminal Code the Republic of Uzbekistan is approved by the law. On 22 September 1994, 2012-XII in the acts from April 1, 1995 (O'zbekiston Oliy kengashining Axborotnomasi, 1995, No. 1. pp. 21–22)	Article 145 highlights the violation of freedom of conscience. Teaching a child about religion, forming a religious conviction in them and thereby involving them in religious activities against the will of the child, the consent and desire of his parents or legal guardians
Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated August 22, 2003 No. 364 (See more, https://lex.uz/docs/-866710?ONDATE=22.08.2003%2000)	"On the provision of social assistance and benefits for further improvement of spiritual and educational work in the field of religion". the subject of educational hours was considered
The law of Ministry of High education and Ministry of Public education on 12 April 2017 (Archive of Republican Educational Center)	Improvement in the teaching of religious sciences
Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated April 16, 2018 No. PF-5416 (See more. https://lex.uz/docs/-3686277)	"On measures to radically improve the activities of the religious and educational sphere"
The Regulation of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, May 2018	"On the course of reading the Koran and Tajweed" was approved
Video selection was held on the problems of education on August 23, 2019. (Xalq so'zi, 2019)	It was noted that it is necessary to introduce a single subject, "Education", combining such disciplines as "History of Religions", "Sense of Homeland"

Table 4.1   (continued)

Education policy	Clauses on universal education
On July 6, 2020, the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted Resolution No. 422 (See more. https://lex.uz/ru/docs/-4885018)	"On measures to gradually introduce the subject of Education" "in general secondary education combining the disciplines "Ethics", "Sense of Fatherland", "Fundamentals of National Independence and Spirituality" and "History of World Religions"
On May 11, 2022, Decree Of the President of Uzbekistan dated No. PF-134 (See more. https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=691904_o'zbekiston_respublikasi_prezident ining_11_05_2022_y_pq-241-son_halq_tali mini_rivojlantirishga_oid_qo'shimcha_chora-tadbirlar_to'g'risidagi_qarori&products=1	"On approval of the national program for the development of public education in 2022–2026" include the questions of measures on teaching spirituality in public schools

1998). In the general curriculum, the subjects in which the foundations of religious education are integrated are taught in the section of various subjects in the 1st to 11th grades. From the academic year 1992–1993, the history of religion was included in the hours allocated to the general history course. Based on the order of the Ministry of Public Education of Uzbekistan (Minister J.G. Yuldoshev), on September 24, 1992, No. 276, it was stated that "*Din asoslari*" (Fundamentals of Religious Studies) was to be taught in secondary schools and the issue of organizing short-term training courses for lecturers (NAUz, fond M.26, op.1, d. 4, l.109–111). This approach focuses on the moderate teachings of Islam and promoting religious enlightenment among young people. This is achieved by including the history of religion in the general history course and teaching the fundamentals of religious studies, sociology, and the history of the people of Uzbekistan in secondary schools. According to the report of the Ministry of Public Education, there were 8,524 schools in the republic in 1992, where 4,611,800 students studied (NAUz, fond M.26, op.1, d. 23, l.32).

In 1992, the Ministry of Public Education introduced curricula in schools based on religion that aimed to cultivate a sense of pride in Uzbekistan's cultural and historical heritage among the younger generation. It is interesting to note that the reintroduction of the old Uzbek script in schools was part of a broader effort to revive the national identity and promote the cultural heritage of Uzbekistan. The decision to teach

courses on the history of religion, theology, and ethics, as well as the use of Arabic script in some optional courses, highlights the importance of religion and traditional values for Uzbek society (NAUz, fond M.26, op.1, d. 13, l. 30, Archive of Republican educational center registered on October 28, 1992).

In this regard, textbooks and school lessons include sections on moral standards to teach religious studies as a means of teaching about religion, emphasizing the spiritual, and enlightening aspects of Islam. The primary form is conducted in secondary education institutions, where the teaching of religion is approached from an academic perspective rather than a theological one. The main type of religious education in Uzbekistan is conducted in secondary schools as a moral course based on theology: *dinshunoslik* [religious studies]; *dunyo dinlari tarixi* [history of world religions]; *tarbiya* [upbringing]; *odobnoma* [etiquette]; *eski uzbek yozuvi* [old Uzbek script]; *adabiyot* [literature]; *tarix* [history]; *dunyo dinlari tarixi* [history of world religions]. These subjects provide information about religious history, and major world and national religions, their worship and rituals described from an academic perspective and based on Islamic moral norms. On the other hand, special state religious institutions, such as madrasas, teach disciplines such as world religions to train imams with religious tolerance toward other religions (Islomov, 2008). The goal is to form a comprehensive civic Uzbekistani personality and build an ideological immunity against religious fundamentalism that does not align with national spirituality (ICG, 2003; Seraphine, 2018).

Table 4.2 shows the changes in the curriculum for grades 1–11 in Uzbekistan over several years. The subjects, grades, and number of hours per program are listed for each academic year. It is interesting to note that the curriculum has undergone some changes over time, with some subjects being removed. The last column indicates the number of hours allocated to each subject in the given academic year. The table also includes references to various sources for the information presented. From 1991 to 1992, "*Odobnoma*" (etiquette) was taught to grades 1–4 for 17 hours out of a total of 68 hours. In addition, *Old Uzbek writing* based on Arabic writing was taught to grades 2–4 for 34 hours, and "*Vatan tuygusi*" (patriotism) was taught to grades 5–6. From 1992 to 1995, the curriculum was expanded to include more subjects such as history, literature, and religion for grades 5–8. The number of hours allocated to the curriculum increased to 85 hours. From grades 9 to 11, the curriculum included "*Dunyo dinlari tarihi*" (History of World Religions)

for 34 hours. In 1999, "*Ma'naviyat asoslari*" (the basics of spirituality) was added to the curriculum for grades 7–9 for 34 hours. In 2001, "*Milliy istiqlol g'oyasi*" (National Independence Idea) and "*Uzbekiston konstitut-siyasi*" (Constitution of Uzbekistan) were added for 34 hours. In 2019, "*Tarbiya*" (Upbringing) was introduced, and all the above-mentioned subjects were excluded from the curriculum for grades 1–11. Finally, it is important to note that the hours per program for each year remained consistent at 34 hours.

It is worth noting that the inclusion of these subjects in the school curriculum reflects the Uzbekistan government's commitment to the holistic development of students, not just in terms of academic knowledge but also in their personal growth and character formation. Moreover, the emphasis on respecting national values and cultural diversity highlights the country's efforts to promote social harmony and inclusivity, and to foster a sense of national unity among its diverse population. By educating young people on these principles, Uzbekistan hopes to build a more tolerant and harmonious society where different cultures and traditions are respected and celebrated.

The Politics of Textbooks in Religious Studies

Religious teaching and morality are introduced into the public schools of Uzbekistan as a secular-modernized concept, defined as part of national culture. The harmonious combination of ideas of interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural tolerance, the union of the spiritual and the secular, describes the creation of the foundations of religious education in a modern political legal society in Uzbekistan. These above-mentioned conceptual questions were covered in school textbooks in the courses of teaching religion about faith. The textbooks contain some texts on religion, mainly Islam, and examples from various religious narratives aimed at conveying feelings of humanity, patriotism, respect for parents, and mutual kindness between people.

If we look through the debates over the textbooks for teaching about religion in public schools, the Minister of Public Education of Uzbekistan, CORA, the Republican Education Center, and the Tashkent Islamic University (now the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan) are responsible for textbooks in the field of religion in public schools. The elaboration of textbooks is followed by the principle, "Secularism is not atheism" (Archive of Republican Educational Center).

Table 4.2 References of the curriculum for grades 1–11 in public schools of Uzbekistan

Time	Ministerial order	Subjects	Grade	Hours per program
1991–1992	NAUz, Fond M.26, op.1, d.2, ll. 212–217	"Odobnoma" (etiquette)	1–4	17/68
	NAUz, fond M. 26, op.1, d. 23, ll. 37	"Old Uzbek writing" based on Arabic writing	2–4	34
			5–11	70
		"Vatan tuygusi" (patriotism)	5–6	52
	NAUz, fond M.26, op.1, d.2, ll. 212–217	"Tarikhdan hikoyalar" (Stories from history),	5–8	85
		"Adabiyot" (Literature), "Tarikh" (History), "Uzbekiston tarihi" (History of Uzbekistan),	9	34/68
		"Jahon tarihi" (World history),		34
		"Din tarixi" (History of religion)		
		"Odobnoma" (Etiquette)	10	
		"Dinshunoslik asoslari" (The basics of religion),	5–8,	34
		"Inson va jamiyatshunoslik" (Human and Social Sciences)	11	
1995	NAUz, fond M. 26, op.1, d. 23, ll. 37	"Uzbekiston xalqlari tarixi" (History of the peoples of Uzbekistan)	8–11	34
	NAUz, fond M.26, op.1, d.383, ll. 251–252	"Dunyo dinlari tarihi" (History of World Religions)	9–11	34
1999	NAUz, fond M.26, op.1, d. 836, ll. 112, 115	"Ma'naviyat asoslari" (The basics of spirituality)	7–9	34

Table 4.2 (continued)

Time	Ministerial order	Subjects	Grade	Hours per program
2001	NAUz, M. 37, op.1, d. 6175, ll. 2	*Milliy istiqlol g'oyasi, Uzbekiston konstitutsiyasi*		34
2019	(Xalq so'zi, 2019)	"*Tarbiya*" (Upbringing) was introduced and all the above subjects were excluded from the curriculum	1–11	34

It should be noted that the preparation of textbooks is considered a serious task by the Ministry of Public Education with efforts. For example, on September 24, 1992, by the order of the approval of the selection committee for the evaluation of concepts and teaching aids in secondary schools in the subjects "*History of the Peoples of Uzbekistan*" and "*Fundamentals of Religious Studies*", the council for textbook authors includes philosophers, historians, and sociologists from the Institute of History, the Pedagogical Institute, and Tashkent Technical University (NAUz, fond M.26, op.1, d.4, ll.109–111). However, the archive documents show that the council did not include specialists in the field of religion to prepare the textbooks.

The textbooks mentioned above focus on world religions, including Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam. While the approach to teaching about religion is confessional, the textbooks also emphasize the similarities and intercultural tendencies between religions. However, it partly presents intercultural tendencies in addition to this confessional character. The focus is mainly to show differences and similarities of each religion. In terms of visual content, we see images of great Arabic scholars, mosques, mausoleums, and historical places in the Islamic context. They are not portrayed with reference to Islamic sources to a great extent. Islam is described in more detail than other confessions, for example, when articulating its origins, sects, branches, and the development of science, art, culture, and spirituality in Muslim countries. Overall, the textbooks in Uzbekistan cover a wide range of topics related to religion and culture in different grades, focusing on ethics, national values, and the contributions of Muslim scientists to world science. While the approach to teaching about religion is confessional, the textbooks also emphasize intercultural tendencies and similarities between religions.

It should be noted that in previous years the textbook on the history of world religions was not taken into discussion by the authors and governmental agencies and published with the same thematic. These debates were raised during a period of internal conflict and turbulence associated with religious fundamentalism and terrorism (Tashkent 1999). For instance, on August 22, 2003, Decree No. 364 from the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the provision of social assistance and benefits for further improvement of spiritual and educational work in the field of religion", declares that in the system of lifelong learning to create textbooks on subjects that acquaint young people with the history, teachings, and essence of religions and gradually introduce

them into the educational process (Archive of Republican Educational Center).

The evidence I have gathered indicates discussions between textbook authors on how to improve the quality and originality of the textbook. For example, Table 4.3 shows meetings of the textbook council emphasized problems in the content and context of the textbook "*History of World Religions*" published between 2002 and 2017 years.

Interestingly, the Decree of the President of Uzbekistan dated April 16, 2018, includes planned measures for radical improvement in the religious and educational sphere. Particularly, one of the measures (paragraph 7) eliminates existing shortcomings in the study of curricula and textbooks in the subjects "*History of world religions*", "*Religious studies*", and "*Spiritual and educational foundations for countering religious extremism and international terrorism*" in the system of public education. In comparison with the previous textbooks and curricula, the Decree indicates a more deliberate and systematic approach to the study of religion and religious extremism. Unlike the preceding book, the next 2019 year adopted the textbook "*Tarbiya*" (Upbringing), which directed the students to understand the basics of Islamic morality, the importance of family, learn good manners, and norms of behavior derived from religion, mainly from the canons of Islam. Nevertheless, this textbook does not cover direct teaching of instruction in religious faith.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the evolution of religious education in public schools in Uzbekistan emphasizes the need to address society's demands for religious education, work on the prevention of radicalization, balance secularism, ensure inclusivity, while acknowledging the historical context. The implementation of religious education in these schools reflects a secular and nationalist approach, as the state maintains a separation from religious institutions and provides limited formal religious education. However, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the presence of Muslims in society, general education schools in Uzbekistan offer classes on religious history and culture. From 1991 to 2001, these subjects primarily provided general information, but since 2001, the teaching of religious subjects has undergone changes due to political factors such as the rise of regional radicalism and religious

Table 4.3 Textbook authors' discussions on "The History of World Religions"

Textbook council	Discussions about textbook "The History of World Religions" (grade 9–11)	Source
On May 29, 2016 Chairman of the CORA	(a) The textbook does not contain information about modern ideological dangers, such as extremist groups that use religion as a cover for their purposes	Archive of Republican Education Center
Tashkent Islamic University	(b) Teaching the subject does not meet today's requirements and does not fully reflect current issues	
	(c) The lack of necessary abilities of teachers in teaching this subject	
Ministry of Public Education	(d) 10% of teachers were non-specialists	
	(e) Teaching in the 9th grade was not sufficient for the age group, some topics in the program were repeated, and there was a lack of coherence and continuity in the curriculum	
	(f) Only the Uzbek language edition of the manual for the years 2002–2006 was available, and there was no textbook at all for schools where education was conducted in Russian and other languages	
2017, the Republican Educational Center	(j) New edition of the textbook focuses on educating and strengthening their ideological immunity which includes folk proverbs, wise words, and thoughts of thinkers related to universal and national values	Archive of Republican Educational Center

extremism. The curriculum's textbooks focus on providing an understanding of various religions rather than promoting any specific faith. The authors of these textbooks approach the history and culture of religion based on the region's historical context and territorial considerations. Given the significant role of Islam in the country's history, the textbooks contain substantial information about the history and teachings of Islam.

The government of Uzbekistan faces several challenges in providing religious education in public schools. While the country identifies as secular, religion remains intertwined with society. The teaching of religion is approached from an academic perspective, with an emphasis on promoting moderate teachings of Islam and instilling ideological immunity against religious fundamentalism. To address these challenges, teaching religion in public schools ensures that the curriculum is inclusive and covers different religions, while also respecting the secular nature of the state. As shown above, teaching about religion in public schools of Uzbekistan focus on national and moral education in the context of Islamic teachings, which helps to promote a sense of cultural and national identity among Uzbekistan's youth. However, it is important to ensure that such education is not used to promote radical or extremist views, and that it respects the diversity of beliefs and opinions.

The study also found that the government could work with religious leaders and organizations to develop a framework for religious education in public schools that takes into account the concerns of all stakeholders. This could involve establishing a committee or commission of representatives from different religions to guide the development and implementation of religious education programs in public schools. Furthermore, it would also make sense to organize an optional course religious studies course for high school students. Additionally, as archive documents show, schools sometimes lack qualified teachers of religious studies. Thus, the government could consider providing training and support to teachers to ensure that they are equipped to teach religious education in a way that promotes tolerance, respect, and understanding. This could involve developing teacher-training programs that focus on religious diversity, cultural sensitivity, and effective classroom management strategies. By implementing these strategies, Uzbekistan can provide students with a high-quality education that promotes tolerance, respect, and understanding of different religious beliefs and perspectives. This would contribute to the cultivation of national pride, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the development of a well-rounded education for the younger generation.

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Islam, Women, and Genderization in Professions: The Case of Uzbekistan

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Introduction

Although women's participation in higher education is increasing, the gender gap in participation in professions or genderization of professions continues to exist in Uzbekistan. Women's participation in higher education in Uzbekistan grew significantly from 31.8% in 2016 to 45% based on the latest data released by the Agency for Statistics of the Republic of Uzbekistan (2022). This is a positive change is facilitated by the opening of approximately 70 new universities in the past six years. There are now over 154 universities and more than 800 thousand students in higher education (The Agency for Statistics of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2022). Again, the genderization of professions continues to exist. In other words, the participation of women in certain "traditional" fields rather than having somewhat balanced participation in all educational domains still holds true.

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Previous studies, such as the United Nations' "Women and Men in Uzbekistan: Differences in Education" (2012), the World Bank's Systematic Country Diagnostic for Uzbekistan (2016), and "the Country Gender Assessment: Update" of the Asian Development Bank (2018) recognize the gender gap in Uzbekistani women's participation in higher education, including the genderization of professions. For example, the World Bank report discusses gendered specializations and shows that 56% of female students enrolled in higher educational institutions (HEI)s are in the fields of education and culture, 40% in healthcare and physical training, 23% in agriculture, 20% in economics and law, and less than 15% in communication, construction, and transportation. This report concludes that gendered specializations can lead to further gender discrimination and lower wages for women (World Bank, 2016).

To understand the genderization of professions in the case of Uzbekistan, the chapter employs a few theories and conceptual frameworks. However, it relies on "the Ambivalent Sexism Theory" by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske (1997) as a main theoretical tool to explain the issue of religious discourses about women's participation in higher education and the genderization of professions. Glick and Fiske state that whenever a woman performs something that is in line with what men think of as agreeable, such a woman receives praise or a *benevolent sexist remark*. When a woman does something that disagrees with men's perception of proper female behavior, she receives harsh criticism or a *hostile sexist remark* (Glick & Fiske, 1997). The four religious figures, namely Tursunoy Sodiqova, Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf (Muhammad Yusuf going forward), Odinaxon Muhammad Sodiq (also referred here as Bintu Sodiq), and Mubashshir Ahmad, whose works the current chapter analyzes, place men at the center of women's all education related activities, including higher education and choosing professions. Furthermore, as the findings of the study show, the four Uzbekistani Muslim religious figures agree that women should do whatever they want within what is legitimate or allowed by Islamic law (*Sharia*), which men usually abuse for their patriarchal interests. If women do not conform to the expectations of men, they become illegitimate in the eyes of society.

This chapter first surveys briefly the studies done in the field of religious discourses and women's participation in higher education as well as the genderization of professions. It also discusses theories and previous works on how one can comprehend and explain the existing gender

gap in participation in different professions and the relevance of religious discourses. The section on the findings of the study will offer more detailed examples of the views of the four religious figures with regard to women's education, higher education, and the genderization of professions. The chapter demonstrates that the Islamic discourses are not necessarily a direct reflection of the state policy, but they are reflections of society. Both the state policies with regard to religion and Islamic discourses produced by these four authors reflect the values of the society and are constructed in a mutually constitutive way.

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Scholars with both emic and etic perspectives have written about religion and education in Uzbekistan specifically and in Central Asia from a more general perspective. For instance, Abdugafurova (2018) discusses the existence of indirect Islamic influence in school and university textbooks. Using the term of *adab* or "a discipline of character development in ethics and morals," and explaining its social implications, Abdugafurova argues that indirect Islamic influences are both implicit and explicit. The author writes: "The Explicitness indicates that Islam is considered part of everyday life and that Uzbek school curriculum includes Islam as part of culture, tradition and history" (p. 232). In relation to the implicit nature of such teachings, the author states, "Implicitness suggests that Islamic values are not the only factor to be considered in moral education in schools but must be combined with secular values" (p. 232). It is possible to interpolate from Abdugafurova's work that the instillation of Islamic morals, ethics, and values is present at the school and university levels in Uzbekistan. Abdugafurova's work is of great value in understanding how Islamic discourses are deeply embedded into the educational system, although the Uzbekistani government claims that its educational curriculum is secular.

Khalilova (2020) also offers important discussions on the history of education and its interaction with religion throughout the Tsarist, communist, and post-Soviet environments. Khalilova discusses how Islamic ideas, although not taught at schools as a religious subject per se, seep into the school curriculum (pp. 105–109). Additionally, the author examines governmental laws on religion and education and their dynamic nature throughout the history of Central Asia.

The genderization of professions is another important subject previous scholars and practitioners have raised with regard to Uzbekistan. Tabaeva et al. (2021) discuss gender inequality "in the fields of education and employment" and state that "women are predominantly concentrated in low-wage social sectors such as education and health, while men dominate income-generating engineering and business sectors such as industry and communication" (p. 38). Other scholars have also addressed issues related to gender norms, women's educational activities in Uzbekistan and in the Central Asian region (Peshkova, 2020; Peshkova & Thibault, 2022; Tokhtakhodjaeva, 2008) and demonstrated how gender norms are constructed by male-centered traditional discourses.

Key publications produced by international organizations, such as World Bank (2016), the United Nations (2012), and Asian Development Bank (2018) all recognize the problem of genderization of specializations and attempt to shed some light on it. For example, the United Nations (2012) identifies six reasons that impact women's participation in higher education and genderization of professions: (1) decision-making for girls by parents in choosing a profession, (2) prioritizing sons over daughters when it comes to paid higher education, (3) social pressure to choose a profession that might be useful for family life for girls, (4) unwillingness of parents to send girls too far away to study, (5) not enough universities in certain regions in the country, and (6) earlier marriages for girls than boys which decrease women's participation in higher education because of early childbirth.

While these studies focus on some social, economic, and geographical factors, they do not explore religious aspects of the issue. The Asian Development Bank (2018) recognizes that there is a need to conduct further studies to "identify more root causes" for the genderization of professions (p. 73). This chapter focuses on this issue and discusses the genderization of professions in Uzbekistan in relation to Islamic discourses and their construction of women's participation in higher education. The chapter considers the mutually constitutive nature of the matter at hand. While the study does not claim a direct correlation between existing Islamic discourses about women's participation in higher education and the genderization of professions, it argues that they are reflective of the Uzbekistani society's values and dominant gender norms since these two factors are mutually constitutive.

As mentioned earlier, the theory adopted in the chapter is "the Ambivalent Sexism Theory" by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske (1997). Glick and Fiske explain the theory in the following way:

> Ambivalent Sexism Theory distinguishes between hostile and "benevolent" sexism (each addresses issues of power, gender differentiation, and sexuality). Benevolent sexism encompasses subjectively positive (for the sexist) attitudes toward women in traditional roles: protective paternalism, idealization of women, and desire for intimate relations. Hostile sexism encompasses the negative equivalents on each dimension: dominative paternalism, derogatory beliefs, and heterosexual hostility. Both forms of sexism serve to justify and maintain patriarchy and traditional gender roles. (p. 119)

The chapter demonstrates through the examples in the findings section, that all four religious figures, including two female authors, express both benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes toward women. This is to say, women who are in the service of men as good mothers and wives receive benevolent sexist remarks while women who take leadership roles in business or other areas are subject to hostile sexist attitudes. Additionally, all the religious figures whose works the chapter analyses here see women's education within the limits of *Shari'a* or Islamic law, and whenever women function beyond these "Islamic legal" boundaries, they become branded as illegitimate.

Religious statements have a bearing on their time and context, which remain under the influence of existing political systems. Carl Ernst (2003) writes that "every claim about religion needs to be examined critically for its political implications" (p. 8). This is to say, that the tones in the changes of the authors from one presidential period to another reflect political adjustments. Ernst (2003) continues to state:

> Religion is not a realm of facts, but a field in which every statement is contested, and all claims are challenged. Religious language in the public sphere is not meant to convey information but to establish authority and legitimacy through assertion and persuasion. (p. 8)

For this reason, this study questions what kind of authoritative "Islamic" messages the four religious figures—Muhammad Yusuf, Tursunoy Sodiqova, Odinaxon Muhammad Sodiq, and Mubshshir Ahmad—are trying to convey, as the hermeneutical influence of such

discourses in the public realm can have political as well as social implications.

Methodology

Qualitative in nature, the current research applies thematic source analysis method (Nowell et al., 2017). Not only textual sources but also social media posts, including audio–video materials, serve as primary sources for the current work. The collected data include books, journal, magazine, and newspaper as well as website articles, short treatises, electronic versions of social media such as Telegram, YouTube, Facebook, and other social media outlets. The most prolific writer among the four selected scholars is Muhammad Yusuf, who wrote hundreds of books in his lifetime. The current study employed twelve of this author's books in addition to his audio, video, and website materials. Fifteen books and treatises in addition to several social media audio and TV programs of Tursunoy Sodiqova were analyzed in the current work. As for the other two current scholars, five books written by Odinaxon Muhammad Sodiq, several articles, and social media posts, three books by Mubshshir Ahmad, and his social media materials were thematically analyzed and applied when relevant.

The study analyzed the collected data based on the select themes that correspond to the central research questions: How do religious discourses construct women's participation in higher education in Uzbekistan? How such Islamic discourses affect women's choice of professions? Do such discourses contribute to the genderization of professions?

The study pays particular attention to the two women religious figures' voices and how they compare to male voices with regard to women's higher education and the gender gap in women's participation in various professions. It also compares changes in the two politically different presidential periods in Uzbekistan—the Karimov's authoritarian rule from 1991 up until 2016, and Mirziyoyev's relaxation of some rules after 2016 to our present day with respect to religious freedom and practice.

Findings

All four religious figures whose works the current chapter employs depict male's role as a central factor in determining women's higher educational and professional decisions. For example, Muhammad Yusuf asks

whether women should work or hold important positions. He writes in his book called *Iymon* [Faith] that "women should first be assistants in their husbands' work. Only when her family is in need, should she work in a *halal* or pious way" (2010, p. 65). Similarly, Tursunoy Sodiqova (2018) states that women must not attempt to take over male roles and promotes the idea that both in the Islamic law (*Sharia*) and in the laws of the society, men are leaders of families (p. 10). The other two religious figures also present similar views with regard to men's role in women's obtaining of higher education or selection of professions. For instance, Odinaxon Muhammad Sodiq argues that women are more adaptable to certain professions, such as teaching, than men are by claiming that men lack patience (Bintu Sodiq, 2022). Mubashshir Ahmad, also argues that men should be responsible for financing women's education (Ustoz Mubashshir Ahmad, 2023). Although such arguments seem to be "praising" or "protecting" women, they qualify as benevolent sexism as they ultimately contribute to the creation of a male-centered environment.

Below is the individual summary of the views of these four Uzbekistani religious figures with regard to the themes, such as how they perceive women's education, including higher education and how they view women's role in society, including women's professions.

Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf

Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf, the former mufti of Central Asia and Kazakhstan from 1989 to 1993, known as *shaykh* or a religious guide, agrees that knowledge acquisition is a duty for men and women. He understands *ilm*, which can be translated as science or knowledge, as utilization of human intellect. He states that the Qur'an mentions the word *ilm* [knowledge] more than 50 times. He (2016a) compares the present practices of knowledge acquisition with past experiences and writes in his book called *Ijtimoiy Odoblar* [Social Ethics] the following:

> When Muslims followed the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the Prophetic Traditions), they spread the light of knowledge to the whole world. Young and old, male, and female, from the cradle to the grave, they lived in search of knowledge. One of the honest western scholars who thoroughly studied that period described the Islamic community as "the community that fully attends the madrasa. (p. 353)

Calling knowledge acquisition as a duty [*farz*] of every Muslim man and woman, Muhammad Yusuf implies his dissatisfaction with the current state of men's and women's educational activities. However, he places the Sharia compliant way of life to be the central factor rather than education itself. Muhammad Yusuf further implies that since Islamic law is not being followed properly, women's education is also not being properly conducted.

Muhammad Yusuf considers the discussion of women or any issue related to women in Islam to be an attack against Islam. He (2010) writes in a book called *Iymon* or Faith, "For various reasons, the issue of women has become one of the main targets of criticism against Islam. Even some Muslim scholars were forced to say that the issue of women is a poisoned dagger stuck in the chest of the Islamic Nation [*Umma*]" (p. 51). By defending Islam, he writes that Islam improved the treatment of women by making them equal to men. He argues that "before Islam, a woman was condemned not only to the violation of her rights, but also to the deprivation of her human status" (p. 52).

Muhammad Yusuf (2016b) is not against women obtaining knowledge, including higher education. He writes: "Raising daughters, their education, and culture, and everything necessary for their livelihood and growth are responsibilities of the father" (p. 53). He further adds that parents who assist their daughters to get knowledge receive more rewards from God than helping their sons to get education. He also emphasizes the importance of knowledge acquisition as a responsibility of women as well. He writes: "Women's rights do not only include education, knowledge acquisition, listening to religious sermons but also have the obligations to teach, impart knowledge, and be busy with other scientific works" (2010, p. 54).

He discusses how women played important roles in the past by writing that "the Muslim woman has always had her share in the fields of society, politics, and Sharia. The right opinion and voice of the Muslim woman were heard by caliphs, the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, and by the Almighty himself (2010, p. 64)." As for the women's participation in different fields, Muhammad Yusuf writes, "now let us talk about the work of a woman in different fields. It should be noted that in Islam, women are not forbidden to work, but this issue is regulated based on the interests of the woman, her family, and the society" (2010, p. 55). This is to say, not only women's own interests, but their family as

well as societal interests determine whether women should be in different professions or not.

It is safe to say that Muhammad Yusuf places women's educational activities, including women's higher education, exclusively in the male domain. He constructs women's knowledge acquisition around men's needs. He (2010) writes that "Islam gave a woman the right to education, raising her cultural level and made men responsible for this work" (p. 53). He states that husbands have complete control over wives if such control conforms to Islamic law. He (2010) further writes:

> It is permissible for a woman to help her husband in his work, to work honestly (through halal means) when her family needs her. That is, she can work if she wants to, otherwise someone cannot force her. Some of our scholars said: "work is sometimes recommended for women who have good character and are of great benefit to society. (p. 65)

It is reasonable to conclude that Muhammad Yusuf perceives women's education from an Islamic legal or *Sharia* perspective. Not only Muslim men and women should obey Islamic laws with regard to women's education, but women should come under male control in such activities. Muhammad Yusuf creates a situation where men control women's educational and professional activities in the name of Islamic law. If women follow such an Islamic way of life, as Glick and Fiske describe in their Ambivalent Sexism Theory, they receive praise. However, breaching Islamic legal norms will result in the illegitimacy of such activities. For this reason, it is possible to state that Muhammad Yusuf's views on women's education and professional work add to the perpetuation of the genderization of professions in Uzbekistani society and beyond.

Tursunoy Sodiqova

Tursunoy Sodiqova is a prolific writer and a well-known figure in the Uzbekistani society. Originally from the Andijan province, she later moved to Tashkent, the capital city of Uzbekistan and graduated from the philology faculty from Uzbek National University (former Tashkent State University) in 1966. With an oratory skill and a life skill, Sodiqova combines her Islamic knowledge and becomes a public speaker, an ethics and etiquette teacher for the general Uzbekistani public, specifically for Uzbekistani women.

In a telegram channel dedicated to Tursunoy Sodiqova, and run by her fans, Sodiqova talks about the value of reading for girls in the video clip titled "Mother is a Great Teacher":

> Let us encourage our daughters to become book lovers from their childhood; books inspire their dreams, enhance their thinking, and introduce them to human morality. Through reading, a person learns how to interact with others. Books reveal the world to them and fill them with wonder. They learn how to build happiness and overcome sorrow. (Tursunoy Sodiqova, 2019, 3:11)

In her book called *Today's Men* [*Bugungi Erkaklar*], Sodiqova (2018) seems to imply that women should have goals other than raising children. In fact, she highly recommends parents to pay more attention to daughters' education than sons' education since daughters are at the center of the family's success. "Since being born, and living as a human being, I have had goals other than raising children. I was able to know the world and people, I struggled, and achieved, and still wonder whether I made my mark or not" (2018, p. 13). However, one can see the elements of benevolent sexism as well as hostile sexism in the examples from her other works. For example, she talks about how women are the greatest beings since they are mothers. This is an example of benevolent sexism. In other instances, she criticizes women who are in business or who fight to take care of their families. As an example of hostile sexism, Sodiqova (2018) states that such cases where women attempt to take over male roles are unacceptable. She promotes the idea that both in the Islamic law and in the laws of the society, men are leaders of families (p. 10).

Furthermore, Sodiqova seems to overwhelm women with familial responsibilities more so than men (Tursunoy Sodiqova, 2021). She states that a wife is obligated not only to change her husband's character for the better but is also responsible for the success or failure of the marriage, including the husband's relationship with his own family members, his career and the like. In general, the well-being of the family is the women's responsibility. She seems to leave little interest in women's own development (Zo'r TV, 2021). She also seems to be critical of women who do not conform to what men see as acceptable and agreeable and promotes the idea that women should conform to societal and patriarchal norms. For instance, she perceives women's foremost role as a housewife. In other words, some of Sodiqova's teachings reflect a male-centered approach to

gender relations as she places the husband at the center of a wife's world (Otinoyilar, 2021, 4:20).

Odinaxon Muhammad Sodiq (Bintu Sodiq)

Odinaxon Muhammad Sodiq is a famed notable religious figure in today's Uzbekistan. She is also known as Bintu Sodiq, referring to the fact that she is the daughter of Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf, the former mufti of Central Asia and Kazakhstan mentioned earlier. Bintu Sodiq is popular not only through the print but also on social media outlets. She is frequently invited to television shows, and all types of educational institutions to give talks, and heads several print and online outlets.

Much like the previous female religious figure Tursunoy Sodiqova, Bintu Sodiq's views regarding women's education and choices of professions align with and reflect the society of Uzbekistan. Additionally, like her father, Muhammad Yusuf, she positions men at the center of the society. She writes in her book called *Remedy for Illiteracy* (*Bilimsizlik Shifosi*):

> In fact, a man should work and provide for the family, and a woman should take care of her family and children. If the workplace conditions are in accordance with Sharia, a woman can work and support her husband when the family is in a difficult financial situation. Also, if a woman's specialty is desired by the society, she can work. Every person, whether male or female, is encouraged to do good deeds. (Muhammad Sodiq, 2021, Volume 1, p. 116)

In the quotation above, Bintu Sodiq places men as responsible for the financial well-being of the household. At the same time, she does not deny that women should work. However, her condition is that the workplace be *sharia* compliant. Furthermore, she says that women can work when her "specialty is desired by the society" (Muhammad Sodiq, 2021, Volume 1, p. 116). By making this statement, Bintu Sodiq seems to imply that women's specialties may not always be desired by society. Like her father, Bintu Sodiq also reiterates that women may work when the family needs her financial support (Muhammad Sodiq, 2021). All these statements demonstrate, firstly, her agreement with the patriarchal rule, and secondly, her apparent neglect of women's continuous and important role

in society. In other words, contrary to her position, women professionals are always needed in society, not occasionally.

In the example below, Bintu Sodiq further adds to her conviction that what women do should always be *Sharia* compliant.

> The teacher and doctor, Abdulfattoh Oshur, an Al-Azhar scholar, said: "A woman, if, by adhering to the sharia of Allah, has made a useful invention from her home, and there is no harm in her driving a car. We used to consider it as a man's responsibility, but now we see that women are equal to men in learning and working in various positions, and there is no harm in them driving a car. (Muhammad Sodiq, 2021, Volume 1, p. 133)

In the above excerpt, Bintu Sodiq demonstrates her agreement with the fact that just like women's driving, participation in professional and educational activities, as long as they are sharia compliant, will not bring harm. This statement seems to imply that there were some people who thought that women who drive, work and study would bring harm, but in fact there is no harm.

It is important to note that the analysis of Bintu Sodiq's social media posts presented her support for women's participation in a variety of fields. For example, she emphasizes that "Whether religious or secular, women need to obtain knowledge" (Bintu Sodiq, 2022). She further adds that "No matter what field women choose as a profession and want to obtain knowledge, they must learn the fundamentals of that field well" (Bintu Sodiq, 2022). She also supports women getting secular education and not only religious knowledge. She says that "If our girls only want to study the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions and everyone switches to this field, and if we need doctors, or economists, or if we need to obtain some information that is in English, then what will happen? Our society needs people who are specialists in all fields" (Bintu Sodiq, 2022). This statement by Bintu Sodiq (2022) shows her support for women's education and specialization in all fields. She further adds:

> When women and girls choose a profession, they should first of all need to consider their ability. Their parents or other relatives must not oppose if women choose their own professions. Every girl becomes passionate about her chosen profession and contributes to the development of that profession. Just simply going to college, and obtaining higher education, and letting the rest of the matter slide is a wrong approach. Women should make progress in their chosen professions. Additionally, some professions

fit women better, particularly in professions that demand patience. In teaching, and where delicate actions are required, women fair better. (Bintu Sodiq, 2022, 27:20)

Although Bintu Sodiq (2022) seems to be supportive of women's freedom to choose the kind of profession they want, she reverts to her earlier opinion that women fit certain professions better than others. She sees women's patience to be a crucial matter in teaching, for example. However, the fact that she stresses that girls should be able to choose their own professions seems like a change of heart for Bintu Sodiq.

Mubashshir Ahmad

Mubashshir Ahmad owns a brand name Azon, popular in Uzbekistan and beyond. His Azon brand includes a TV channel, Azon.uz website, and a press company called Azon Kitoblari, bookstore form cafes, etc. He completed a translation of Arabic books on Islamic jurisprudential projects and published a 47-volume encyclopedia. The presentation of the work was conducted with much fanfare and Bintu Sodiq also presented at the event, talking about the value of the project as well as the kind of work Mubashshir Ahmad is doing. Ahmad is quite famous and vociferous in social media and offers controversial views at times. His book, *Olim, Odam va Olam* [Scholar, Human, and World] is one of the top ten books most purchased in Uzbekistan (Telegram Store, 2023). According to Playboard statistics, he has more than 80 thousand subscribers on his YouTube channel with close to 9 million views. He has over 110 thousand Instagram followers, and on his Telegram channel, he has over 73 thousand followers with over 1000 video posts. His Azon.tv on the YouTube platform, which is called *Ustoz Mubashshir Ahmad,* has over one million subscribers.

Ahmad agrees with the other three scholars regarding his support for women's education. He mentions that it is an Islamic duty for women as much as for men to seek knowledge (Ustoz Mubashshir Ahmad, 2021, 38). He also mentions his own daughters, one of whom wants to become a surgeon and the second daughter who wants to become a psychologist. Ahmad further adds that it is not women's responsibility to pay for their education. In fact, "women should be able to obtain whatever they want, including knowledge, with the support of and by depending on men" (Ustoz Mubashshir Ahmad, 2021, 2:05). This way, he argues, women

will not face problems in their work since they are not responsible for any financial matters. He adds that if a woman does not have financial problems at home, and if their husbands take care of such matters, such professional women will not seek bribes or other means to make money (Ustoz Mubashshir Ahmad, 2023, 11:28).

Although Ahmad seems to support women's education, including higher education and women's ability to able to choose their own professions, he seems to make them dependent on men. In his YouTube video called "How a Woman Can Organize Work, Education, and Household Chores," he states that women's most important work is raising children (Ustoz Mubashshir Ahmad, 2023, 0:30). He explains that Islamic legal rulings are usually general but can sometimes be exceptional. Discussing women's participation in different roles, such as leadership roles as well as being presidents, Ahmad states that such cases are exceptional and do not qualify as general rulings (Ustoz Mubashshir Ahmad, 2023). The relevance of this notion to women's work, education, and household chores, according to Ahmad, is the nature of the woman—a delicate being that cannot handle certain professional responsibilities other than in exceptional cases. Gender equality, he argues, does not reach over 10 or 15% even in most democratic countries. Because of the delicate nature of their being, women should therefore be involved in their own fields (Ustoz Mubashshir Ahmad, 2023, 9:30).

Mubashshir Ahmad, speaking about women's work in general, states that the Uzbek proverb—husband and wife are both responsible for the family's financial well-being—is wrong. He states that only men are responsible for the family's financial well-being, and if women want to work from home and earn income, the money earned will belong to women and not to the family or husband (Ustoz Mubashshir Ahmad, 2021, 0:10).

CONCLUSIONS

All four religious voices the current chapter has discussed call for women's knowledge acquisition but when it comes to women's participation in higher education and profession choice, the views of these four authors presented some differences. All these four figures, who produce publications, social media, and other digital products, reflect the realities of the current Uzbekistani society. The fact that they have such profuse and pervasive presence makes one wonder if they share similar religious

ideologies in their religious and intellectual productions. As the findings of the current study demonstrate, obvious contradictions by the same religious figure (in the case of Bintu Sodiq) can in fact be the result of her later alignments with the state policies with regard to religious affairs. In sum, it is fair to say that a genderization of professions persists in Uzbekistan and that such an attitude can obviously inhibit certain women from achieving their full potential. Although the current study does not claim that there is direct correlation between Islamic discourses and women's participation in higher education and genderization of professions, such religious figures, with authority and influence, seem to contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchal norms in the Uzbekistani society, particularly in women's higher education and choice of professions.

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Exploring STEM Teacher Educators' Gender Awareness and Understanding of Gender-responsive Pedagogies in Kazakhstan

Ainur Almukhambetova

Introduction

Central Asian women demonstrate relatively high enrollment rates in higher education. For instance, women's enrollment in higher education is 55% and 57.6% in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, respectively (UNESCO, 2021). Although at 45.6% enrollment in Uzbekistan and around 38% in Tajikistan, women are underrepresented in higher education, both countries report improvement in women's participation rates. For example, Uzbekistan reported a fivefold increase in women's enrollment in higher education (President of Uzbekistan, March 2023). In Tajikistan, there was a 10% increase in women's enrollment in higher education compared to 2017 (Tajstat, 2017). However, in light of overall favorable women's

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educational positions, it is remarkable that Central Asian women are underrepresented in STEM fields in higher education. In 2018, for instance, no more than 30% of young people enrolled in STEM programs in Kyrgyzstan were women (UNESCO, 2021). The gender gap in STEM fields is even more prominent in Tajikistan (Kataeva, 2022). Overall, Central Asian countries demonstrate significant gender gaps in STEM fields.

The underrepresentation of women in STEM disciplines can be viewed as a cumulative problem. A smaller number of girls are engaged in STEM-related activities at the secondary school level. This trend persists after school graduation when future majors are selected (Almukhambetova & Kuzhabekova, 2020). According to UNESCO (2021), these gender differences become even more prominent when it comes to transition to the job market and career advancement.

The decreasing participation of women in STEM is highly undesirable from various standpoints. Research suggests that sustainable development and economic prosperity are more likely in economies with higher levels of gender equality. In this regard, gender has a political-economic dimension as it structures the division within paid labor between higher-paid male-dominated occupations and lower-paid female-dominated occupations (Fraser, 2020). This also reinforces the gendered norms around inferior roles of women not only within households but also in society, as low wages and limited employment opportunities deflate the social status of women. This results in a political-economic structure that generates gender-specific modes of marginalization (Fraser, 2020).

Promoting gender equity in STEM challenges the preconception that women are less competent in scientific fields than men and helps to eliminate discrimination in education and employment. Expansion of opportunities for women in high-paying STEM occupations will lead to women's empowerment. More education and career opportunities, especially in high-paying fields, give women a voice against social and political injustice, help reduce social inequality, decrease social tension, and eventually lead to social and economic development in the region.

Kazakhstan, one of the Central Asian countries, presents a critical case for analyzing women's underrepresentation in STEM. Kazakhstan scores higher than other Central Asian countries on gender indicators (UNESCO, 2021). Women's enrollment in higher education in Kazakhstan is progressively higher than that of men (UNESCO, 2021), giving the initially promising picture of gender equity in Kazakhstani education.

However, there is a significant overrepresentation of male students in the bulk of STEM majors, with significant variation across the subjects. As a result, high-paying STEM sectors are heavily male-dominated, while in low-paying health care and education, there is a significant overrepresentation of women. There is also a significant wage gap, with women earning only 68.6% of men's wages.

The voices of STEM women in Kazakhstan suggest that they confront hidden barriers, mostly rooted in social and cultural expectations from women (Almukhambetova et al., 2022), and the critical stage when they need to receive gender-responsive academic and career counseling is at high school when academic pathways are selected (Almukhambetova & Kuzhabekova, 2020). Although previous research highlights teacher educators' gender awareness as one of the priority factors, STEM teachers often display little understanding of their agency to challenge the underrepresentation of women in STEM (Durrani, 2022).

Pre-service teacher education is the most effective way to ensure that future teachers are able to reflect on their gendered practices and use education as a means to promote gender equality. Therefore, it is important to explore teacher educators' gender awareness and understanding of gender responsiveness in pedagogy, as they are the actors who shape pre-service teachers' knowledge, skills, and professional identity. This will help identify the underlying tensions in STEM teacher education that hinder the progress toward implementing gender-responsive instruction and career counseling. Equipped with a better understanding of the teacher-related hindrances that women face in their education as well as the factors that influence their performance and retention in STEM, policymakers can implement measures to improve women's recruitment and retention in STEM fields.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Several studies have been conducted in Kazakhstan to understand why women are underrepresented in STEM occupations. Prior research suggests that parents and extended family members often discourage girls from choosing STEM university majors (Almukhambetova & Kuzhabekova, 2020). While pursuing STEM higher education, young women confront hidden biases from male professors and male peers, mostly rooted in women's social and gender expectations (Almukhambetova et al., 2022). Even if the girls find themselves in a supporting

university environment, they continue to face low expectations regarding their future employment in STEM from family members and potential employers (Almukhambetova & Kuzhabekova, 2021).

Previous research suggests that the educational process can improve or constrain girls' engagement in STEM. School textbooks often frame STEM as a male-dominated domain (Durrani et al., 2022). School teachers often hold gender stereotypes and are not always aware of their agency to challenge the underrepresentation of women in STEM. Such factors as teachers' gender awareness and gender responsiveness, professional development and support (Kalu, 2005; Chikunda, 2014) are critical in improving not only access, performance, and engagement with STEM studies but also further career choice.

Therefore, in order to step forward toward gender equity in STEM, there is a need to improve teacher training in particular. The evidence suggests that teacher education often fails to equip future teachers with the values, attitudes, and skills required for gender-responsive instruction and advising (Khalil et al., 2023). Limited teacher education policies are not aimed at addressing the inequities in education. As a result, teachers are often unaware of gender-responsive teaching strategies or graduate from teacher training universities without knowing how to address gender issues in their practices (Kalu, 2005).

Meanwhile, the research around gender and STEM education reports on various factors that affect girls' decision to pursue careers in STEM, which teacher's intervention can mitigate. Despite their strong aptitudes in sciences and math, girls often have a lower level of confidence and interest in STEM subjects than boys (Stoet & Geary, 2018) and their self-concept tends to decline as they progress through their studies (Murphy & Whitelegg, 2006). As a result of the low confidence and interest level, girls are less likely to enroll in STEM subjects at the high school level, especially in subjects later required to enroll in college-level engineering, physics, and computer science courses.

Implicit gender bias is often manifested in STEM curricula and assessments (Miske, 2013). Girls are often sidelined by their male peers STEM classrooms and laboratory activities, who take leadership roles in using the classroom material and equipment. Such classroom practices impede female students' self-esteem and attitudes toward science. Therefore, teachers' advising and gender-responsive instruction are critical in determining the female students' feelings toward STEM subjects and their self-concept in relation to it (Murphy & Whitelegg, 2006).

The gender-responsive pedagogies can create a supportive environment for girls to accommodate their needs, enhance their interests, and benefit from participation in all classroom and laboratory activities.

Research also shows that male and female students do not share the same educational goals. Female students might be more idealistically oriented than male students as they aspire to contribute to society and help people (Sinnes & Løken, 2014). As female students often believe that STEM subjects lack relevance for their goals, gender-aware teachers can engage with students' beliefs about STEM, increase their motivation to study STEM subjects, and influence their alienation from it (Krogh & Thomsen, 2005; Murphy & Whitelegg, 2006). Such issues as insufficient peer support in class (Graham et al., 2013), subtle forms of discrimination in group work, combined with the overpowering image of the STEM profession as a masculine occupation, contribute to the feeling of poor fit and self-doubt, and discourage the girls from full engagement with STEM subjects. Differential teaching and assessment strategies and compensatory interventions can eliminate these issues. In addition, certain interventions to STEM curricula can also help to address the girls' missing skills due to the lack of engagement with STEM outside classes (Murphy & Whitelegg, 2006) and eliminate the gender gaps in students' performance and teachers are the key to the success of these interventions.

While the literature points out the importance of gender responsiveness in curriculum and instruction and the teachers' gender awareness, there is a lack of research on how teacher educators understand and implement gender responsiveness in educating future STEM teachers. Therefore, this chapter targets STEM teacher educators in several teacher training universities in Kazakhstan to explore their gender awareness and understanding of gender responsiveness in educating future STEM teachers.

The study will be framed by the 4Rs framework (based on Fraser's social justice theory), which uses the concepts of recognition, redistribution, representation, and reconciliation with respect to socio-economic and cultural processes that marginalize women from educational and employment opportunities. According to Fraser (2007), any struggle for gender justice implies redistribution (achieving egalitarian socio-economic structures), recognition and representation (recognizing diversity and enabling equal participation), and reconciliation (addressing the barriers for marginalized groups) (Novelli et al., 2019). The application of this framework will offer a novel PEA perspective on how to address the teacher-related hindrances in women's participation in STEM education in a Central Asian context.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research approach (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Semi-structured interviews were the main method of data collection since they provided an opportunity for the researcher to understand the participants' experiences in the words of the participants themselves, allowing to combine the organization of the dialogue around themes suggested by the literature and flexibility to follow up on unexpected themes dynamically. The process of conducting the study was guided by ethical principles and regulations of the University of Ulster. The data collection started after obtaining the ethics committee's approval. Twenty-two STEM teacher educators working in five teacher training universities in Kazakhstan were interviewed (see Table 6.1 for more details on the participants' background characteristics).

Table 6.1   Participants background characteristics

Region	Gender	STEM domain	Teaching experience	Age	Code
North	F	Chemistry	19+	–	A
North	F	Biology	10+	–	B
South	M	Maths	15+	40	C
South	F	Physics	15+	38	D
South	F	Maths	15+	40	E
North-East	F	Maths	20+	48	F
Almaty	F	Chemistry	25+	53	G
North	M	Chemistry	6	28	H
North-East	M	Physics	18	40	I
North-East	F	Informatics	17	42	J
North-East	F	Informatics	10	37	K
South	F	Computer Science	5	30	L
South	F	Computer Science	10	34	M
Almaty	F	Chemistry	15	40	N
North-East	F	Informatics	12	–	O
North	F	Physics	12	35	P
North-East	M	Informatics	10	32	Q
North	F	Physics	10+	36	R
South	M	Computer Science	7	35	S
South	M	Computer Science	5	33	T
Almaty	F	Chemistry	15	40	U
North	F	Biology	10+	–	V

The interview protocol consisted of 15 questions, which were developed based on previous research on gender responsiveness in teaching, as well as the literature on school-related barriers to women's underrepresentation in STEM. The participants who agreed to take part in the study were contacted by the author to schedule an online or face-to-face interview. Due to time constraints, 14 interviews were conducted online via Zoom by research assistants or the author.

Each interview started with an explanation of the purpose of the research and anonymity and confidentiality measures to protect the participants' identities. The participants were then offered to sign an informed consent form. The interviews lasted for about 40–60 minutes, were recorded by the interviewer, and then transcribed. Sixteen interviews were conducted in the Russian language, and six interviews were conducted in Kazakh language. All interviews were entered into NVivo 12 software to organize and analyze the data.

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: To what extent are STEM teacher educators gender-aware and demonstrate their agential potential to engage with gender issues in STEM?

RQ2: How do teacher educators understand gender-responsive pedagogies?

RQ2.1: What do the teacher educators do to teach gender-responsive instructional strategies and curriculum practices to future STEM teachers?

RQ 2.2: What are the underlying tensions in STEM teacher education that hinder the progress toward gender-responsive instruction and curriculum practices?

Findings

Teacher Educators' Perceptions of Barriers to Girls and Women's Participation in STEM

When asked about the problem of the underrepresentation of girls and women in STEM, teacher educators agreed on the presence of certain stereotypes associated with "feminine" and "non-feminine" jobs. For example, a female participant commented: "I think the main reason why

there are fewer girls is the stereotype of feminine and non-feminine jobs" (Participant-P, female, Physics).

Another societal gender stereotype reported by the participants is that women are incapable of performing well as a professional while being married and having children. As a female teacher stated, if the woman is married, she is at once constrained by domestic chores, and people do not expect her to be able to cope with both-family responsibilities and be a highly qualified professional (Participant-P, female, Physics). With regard to STEM, for a woman, starting a marriage almost always means that she ends her career. The quotes below are particularly illustrative:

> Let's say, there is a girl, she gets married and all, but the computer sphere is developing every day, so … You understand? The girl wouldn't manage that physically, she's taking care of a baby for a year (maternity leave), and then she wouldn't be able to keep up. (Participant-E, female, Mathematics)
>
> There are usually different comments, like: Why do you need mathematics, you are going to marry tomorrow and that's all. (Participant-F, female, Mathematics)

According to the participants, one of the reasons stems from how girls and boys are socialized in their families. Men are socialized to prioritize careers, while women are expected to prioritize marriage and having children. As one participant commented: "Boys are brought up differently as they need to be stronger…they receive more attention as they are treated differently, and girls are brought up as calm and reserved as they are female gender" (Participant-A, female, Chemistry). Another participant also noted that the main reason is the difference in upbringing:

> I came to the conclusion that the traditional upbringing that we give girls is to be calm and obedient. And for the boys, it is the opposite, o be active and strong, and the boys know how to cope with competition and stress. So, the main reason is the different upbringing that we give to boys and girls. (Participant-B, female, Biology)

TEM teacher educators almost unanimously stated that another barrier to women's participation in STEM is the influence of parents on girls' decisions of whether to pursue a career in STEM fields or not. Most participants agreed that parents in Kazakhstani households have a significant influence on girls' decisions. They also highlighted that it is a part of Kazakhstani culture to teach the girls to be subordinate to other peoples'

decisions and think in advance if their future jobs are going to constrain them from their "main role of being a good wife." As one participant commented: "Traditional beliefs of the parents, they do matter. We still give traditional upbringing to our girls, to be calm and subordinate, and it's a pity that exactly because the girls choose other fields" (Participant-F, female, Mathematics). Another participant added: "Girls are often told by parents that easy majors are better for them, Philology, for example. Parents mostly influence that choice" (Participant-R, female, Physics).

Importantly, when asked about the main barriers to girls' and women's representation in STEM, none of the teacher educators mentioned any school or teaching-related barriers to girls' and women's participation in STEM. They mostly blamed parents for the gendered upbringing, the government for the absence of gender-related policies, and the media for the lack of popularization of science. As one teacher stated, the only measure to address the issue of having few women in STEM is to provide more grants and even quotas to encourage girls to enroll in STEM majors: "The government needs to provide grants, even quotas for technical specialties" (Participant-T, male, Computer Science).

In addition to being unaware of the role of education in addressing the underrepresentation of women and girls in STEM, teacher educators unanimously stated that there is no gender-based discrimination in Kazakhstan. As one interviewed teacher educator stated: "In our country, we don't have gender discrimination, you know that" (Participant-Q, male, Informatics). Similarly, a female participant commented: "I notice that there are no gender differences in school and university – we don't have that in Kazakhstan" (Participant-D, female, Physics). This signals STEM teachers' gender "blindness," which can be detrimental to promoting gender equality in and through education.

Overall, the data analysis revealed that STEM teacher educators demonstrate only a surface understanding of barriers that girls and women encounter in STEM and a limited understanding of teaching-related influences on girls' and women's participation in STEM.

STEM Teachers' Understanding of Their Agency and Gender-Responsive Pedagogies

As the key agents of addressing the issue of women's underrepresentation in STEM, teacher educators require appropriate knowledge of gender-related issues in STEM education. As it became clear from the

interviews, STEM teacher educators demonstrate a limited understanding of their agency in addressing gender inequality in STEM. Only two out of 22 teacher educators mentioned the important role of teachers in developing students' interest in STEM. As one of them commented: "I think that we have very few trained teachers who are able to instill the interest in science, technology, and programming, and attract the students to science projects and research" (Participant-J, female, Informatics). Another comment: "The student should be genuinely interested in attending the lesson, and only because of this interest will the student choose this profession in the future. The role of the teacher is critical here. We still cannot teach the girls: make them understand that they are as cool in science as the boys" (Participant-H, male, Chemistry).

The analysis identified that teacher educators were not aware of what gender-responsive pedagogy entails. The participants also agreed that they have never been trained to teach gender responsiveness and have never discussed gender-responsive instruction with their colleagues. They seem to lack pedagogical knowledge and skills to incorporate gender-responsive pedagogy in their training of pre-service STEM teachers.

The study findings also show that almost all participants were unfamiliar with differentiated teaching and assessment strategies pertaining to students' gender. As one of the participants stated: "I do not practice this [gender responsiveness]. I give the same instructions to all; I do not have a personal approach according to students' gender" (Participant-G, female, Chemistry). Others also commented:

> When you go to class, you never think that there might be any gender differences. (Participant-M, female, Computer Science)
>
> For the teacher-they must be equal both male and female students. When we assess the students, we do it based on certain criteria, and we do not have any gender-sensitive assessment strategies which differ depending on the fact if you are a girl or a boy. (Participant-R, female, Physics)

Even if teacher educators thought that sometimes female students needed more support, they still attributed this to their deficiencies. As one participant commented: "I think that female students need more mentorship as they are less concentrated compared to male students" (Participant-K, female, Informatics).

The participants also stated that they never train pre-service teachers how to engage both male and female students more efficiently in STEM-related activities, how to promote equal opportunities in their learning, and how to avoid unintentional gender stereotyping in the classroom. Moreover, not all the participants understand that students' learning styles might differ with regard to students' gender. There was also little understanding of gender responsiveness in curriculum design and gender differences in students' motivation levels. Only one participant stated that this lack of understanding needs to be reconsidered: "we need to take this more seriously–what we lack in education. Unfortunately, it is too far from reality… but if there was a reform in curriculum design- this could be definitely changed…" (Participant-F, female, Mathematics).

STEM Teachers' Gendered Views and Sexist Attitudes

The study identified that STEM teacher educators not only display a lack of knowledge of gender issues in STEM education and gender responsiveness in teaching but also actively reproduce gender through their gendered views on students' abilities, gendered practices, and discriminatory attitudes.

STEM Teachers Educators' Views on Students' Abilities
The analysis of interview data revealed teacher educators' gendered perceptions of girls' and women's abilities in STEM. Several participants stated that women are not biologically inclined to succeed in STEM, while men are naturally smarter than women:

> Men are the ones who engage more, also because it's the technology and electronics- all more of a male thing. I accept it. Technology and electronics are theirs!...males are intellectually better; they're interested in electronics. (Participant-E, female, Mathematics)

Others argued that the STEM field is associated with male traits such as being "persistent" and "psychologically stable," whereas women are "irrational," "too emotional," "less focused," and "multifunctional,' the latter characteristic bearing a strong negative connotation. As one participant comments: "If we look at the IT sphere, mainly males choose this field…as they are more psychologically stable" (Participant-H, male, Chemistry). Other likewise commented:

They [men] go for IT more because they're more interested, and they will persist once they're interested in making robots etc.; it's their male character; they always persist. (Participant-E, female, Mathematics)

A man into chemistry – they're only into chemistry – it's their character, they don't look back, they go till the end. But girls are ... They take up English, history, and this, and that ... Multifunctional. (Participant-E, female, Mathematics)

These types of gendered assumptions might construct different expectations from female and male students and teach pre-service teachers stereotypical ways of doing gender. Viewing gender differences as natural entails perceiving boys' and girls' abilities as static and unchangeable. Viewing male and female students differently, with differences rooted in biology rather than similar, signals teacher educators' unawareness of gender inequalities and societal stereotypes from which these inequalities stem. This might create a gendered learning environment that treats female and male students differently.

STEM Teacher Educators' Views on Gender Role Stereotypes

As mentioned previously, the gendered views on girls' and women's abilities in STEM could have stemmed from social stereotypes and gender role stereotypes existing in society. Most teacher educators seem to conform to gender role stereotypes that are prescribed to girls and women. As one participant stated: "Our [women's] role is different" (Participant N, female, Chemistry). "In our KZ culture, too, we have to cook food and care for kids; we can't say we are going to do something [meaningful]" (Participant-E, female, Mathematics).

Some participants were even very defensive of their views, arguing that it is normal to have fewer women in STEM areas. They did not even support the idea that men and women should be equally represented in STEM. As one teacher stated: "Do we need to change the situation at all? Maybe leave it as it is [women are underrepresented], as this is normal? Why do we need to address this problem and attract more women to STEM? There is no need" (Participant-I, male, Physics). A similar quote from another participant: "We want more girls in STEM area? For what?" (Participant-Q, male, Informatics).

The comments above point out that teachers are socialized in a gendered patriarchal society that fosters gender inequality (Peshkova &

Thibault, 2022; Thibault & Caron, 2022). Teacher educators' patriarchal socialization in the context of strictly defined gender norms is a contributing factor to their lack of gender awareness and unwillingness to implement gender responsiveness in their teaching practices.

Teacher Educators' Sexist Attitudes and Gendered Practices
The study identified an association between the teacher educators' gendered views on students' ability and their gendered teaching practices. The comment from a participant who describes active teacher-student engagement with those students who, in her view, are more capable in STEM is particularly illustrative:

> I see those students who are more capable and then work with these students more … I do not practice gender responsiveness. Male or female students, I do not care, I just engage more with those students who are more capable, but, as you understand, they are mostly males. (Participant-I, male, Physics)

Another example of gendered practices that teacher educators seem to communicate to pre-service teachers included: "The boys should be stronger; that's why the teacher should explain to them that they are '*jigits*' [horse riders]. And the teachers need to explain to girls that they are a weaker gender" (Participant-G, female, Chemistry).

Overall, about half of the teacher educators displayed discriminatory or even sexist attitudes to girls' and women's academic achievement, women's representation in STEM, and their choice of subjects.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to generate insights into the tensions associated with STEM teacher educators' gender awareness and their understanding of gender-responsive pedagogies in Kazakhstan. It has become evident that teacher educators have little understanding of how the gender gap in STEM fields is associated with teaching and attributed it to other factors, such as family/ parents influence, stereotypes about STEM professions, lack of government policies, and influence of media.

The findings also reveal that STEM teacher educators display a limited understanding of gender-responsive pedagogies and differentiated instructional and assessment strategies. STEM teacher educators also

demonstrate low levels of gender awareness and a lack of knowledge and skills for implementing gender-responsive pedagogies. Moreover, teacher educators also seem to hold strong beliefs in men's superior performance in STEM (Copur-Genturk et al., 2020). These gendered attitudes predict women's self-perceptions of their abilities in STEM and future success in STEM above and beyond academic performance as they limit the aspirations of female students who assimilate these attitudes (Sansone, 2017). The students are more likely to be disengaged in STEM subjects if teachers project gender stereotypes. Moreover, if STEM teacher educators hold gendered attitudes and values, it means that they transmit these values to pre-service teachers (Chicunda, 2014).

With respect to teachers' agency for addressing gender inequities, shifting STEM teachers' gendered views also presents a challenge. STEM teacher educators in Kazakhstan display a lack of agency to embody and enact gender justice. Their enactment of teaching is highly influenced by gender role stereotypes existing in Kazakhstani society, as STEM teachers endorse these stereotypes. This reflects in their gendered practices and discriminatory attitudes. Through their gendered practices, teachers also communicate their views, values, and beliefs about the subject they teach (Grootenboer & Ballantine, 2010). It has also become evident that STEM teacher educators are not in the position to systematically engage with the problem of girls' and women's underrepresentation in STEM, thereby limiting the agency of pre-service STEM teachers to engage with this issue when they start to teach at schools.

Revealing these STEM teacher educators' gendered views and practices, it is important to suggest ways to challenge them. In the following section, the mitigating strategies to address the tensions associated with STEM teacher education and perceptions of inequity in STEM are discussed.

Applying the 4R Framework for Addressing the Tensions in STEM Teacher Education

Recognition

As Fraser (2001, 2007) argued, when cultural structures restrict women and deny them the resources (in our case, access to quality STEM education and STEM careers) to be on equal grounds with men, the under-recognition and maldistribution become issues of gender justice.

In the context of STEM teacher education, recognition involves acknowledging and addressing the ways in which STEM teacher educators may hold gendered attitudes and beliefs that can impact their understanding and implementation of gender-responsive pedagogies. This can include recognizing the existence of gender stereotypes that contribute to these attitudes and practices, as well as recognizing the lack of consistent policies, addressing gender inequality as well as understanding any cultural, historical, and socio-economic factors that may influence these gendered attitudes and beliefs.

Redistribution
Redistribution refers to the ways in which resources and opportunities are distributed among different groups of people. In the context of STEM teacher education, redistribution involves addressing how gendered practices in STEM teaching may be limiting the opportunities for female STEM students.

Certain measures should be implemented to eliminate the gendered practices in STEM teaching. The tasks in STEM subjects should be gender-sensitive in a way that meets the specifics of students' learning styles. The content of STEM teaching materials and textbooks should avoid stereotypical language and images. The materials should also contain images or representations where the traditional division of labor is reversed, and both women and men are promoted as being equally successful in STEM occupations. The curriculum should reflect the positive representation of women working in STEM fields. The students' existing knowledge should be considered as, in many cases, girls might not have the same exposure to STEM activities and might not possess some skills at the same level as boys (e.g., ICT skills). Therefore, teachers should select the STEM activities as well as the course material and assessment based on an understanding of students' existing skills and preparedness. Teachers should promote a discussion with school administration and parents if, in some subjects and STEM clubs/activities, the girls are particularly underrepresented.

Representation
Representation refers to the ways in which different groups of people are represented in various spheres of society. In the context of STEM teacher education, representation involves addressing the lack of training, mentoring, and professional development opportunities both for STEM

teacher educators and STEM teachers. As critical actors, STEM teacher educators need to be exposed to training and professional development on how to incorporate gender responsiveness and gender-responsive instructional and assessment strategies in teaching pre-service STEM teachers. This training should be incorporated into teacher training programs across Kazakhstan. The study highlights the need for supporting teacher educators' professional development to help improve their knowledge of gender responsive pedagogy in addition to improving their gender awareness and eliminating gendered attitudes and practices.

Reconciliation

In the context of STEM teacher education, reconciliation means implementing policies and practices that raise awareness of teaching-related hindrances and empower STEM teachers to enact their agency and work toward creating a more inclusive and equitable STEM education system. STEM teachers at all levels should display a conscious effort to promote girls' interests in STEM. There needs to be a shift in STEM teacher educators' awareness toward becoming more agentic and engaging more talented female students to STEM, making it more inclusive and welcoming for girls.

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Uncovering Gender, Language, and Intersected Asymmetries in History Textbooks

Zhazira Bekzhanova

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is crucial for peace and social cohesion. According to Kangas et al. (2014), greater gender inequality can lead to increased social tension. It is particularly important to reduce tensions in school education since pupils can be brought up with the assumption that injustice is the norm, and they might practise exclusion and discrimination when reaching adulthood. Therefore, the United Nations has prioritised sustainable development goal (SDG) 4.7 within SDG 4 'Quality Education' (United Nations, 2015). SDG 4.7 aims to provide knowledge and skills for learners to foster gender equality, peace, and non-violence (United Nations, 2015).

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117

All three Central Asian countries included in the current book have recognised SDG 4 and borrowed and adjusted it to their national policies. Kazakhstan, for instance, does not directly report on SDG 4.7, but expresses its commitment to the general SDG 4 (Sustainable Development Goals, n.d) and has adopted inclusive education, which might show its commitment to SDG 4.7 (Kazakhstan, 2007). Tajikistan is more explicit about SDG 4.7, and it has set up an objective 'to ensure access to quality and inclusive life-long learning and skills opportunities' in education (United Nations Tajikistan, 2022). Uzbekistan emphasises that the schools teach human and children's rights at school within SDG 4.7 (State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, n.d.).

However, none of the countries explicitly mentions gender equality as an essential part of SDG 4.7 or what they do to provide knowledge on gender equity in education in their local reports. Nevertheless, as the Central Asian countries have announced their commitment to the goal, it can be assumed that gender equality is also implied to be one of the values in their policies since SDG 4.7 includes it. This study seeks to verify this assumption within school history textbooks. Focusing on Kazakhstan as a case, this paper examines whether secondary schools share and project positive views on gender equality in school textbooks, and whether they contribute to instilling the new generation with gender equality values. Additionally, the study explores the intersection of gender with other social and language bias, responding to the impetus by Durrani et al. (2022).

The impact of the school curriculum in shaping pupils' worldviews makes it important to uncover any discrepancies between national policy on social equality, education, and curriculum content. The focus is on Kazakhstani history curriculum and textbooks since this country ranks higher on education and gender equality indicators (Tabaeva et al., 2021), making it a critical case study. Kazakhstan's superiority in gender equality is obvious by its lowest gender inequality index (GII) in the region—0.161 for 2021, while in Tajikistan it equals 0.285, and in Uzbekistan—0.227 (UNDP, 2022). Hence, Kazakhstani school textbooks are expected to align with gender equality targets and indicators more than other countries in the region. If gender and ethnic inequalities are found even in Kazakhstani textbooks, this may indicate that these challenges are more profound in other Central Asian countries.

This study seeks to verify this alignment by examining history textbooks. Globally, history textbooks have been shown to reflect political

ideologies and perpetuate inequalities (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000), and they are a key site for constructing national identity in a gendered way since national narratives in history textbooks differentiate between men and women concerning their positions and responsibilities (Durrani & Dunne, 2010). By exploring history textbooks from a gender perspective, we can gain a deeper understanding of other social asymmetries in education (Dunne, 2009), particularly regarding nation-building strategies (Tabaeva et al., 2021).

Conceptual Framework

Gender (in)equality in Central Asia and Kazakhstan

Despite a shared history, cultural heritage, Turkic roots, Islam as a predominant religion, and geographical proximity, Central Asian countries vary in gender equality due to several reasons, including different levels of commitment to traditions and religion. For example, Uzbekistan was historically more religious than Kazakhstan, and Uzbek women faced greater challenges from the Soviet anti-veiling campaign (1920s) (Kane & Gorbenko, 2016). The Soviet administration viewed Muslim women in Central Asia as 'backward and oppressed', with the first step towards gender equality being the reduction of Islam's influence (Behzadi & Direnberger, 2020).

Being in close proximity to Russia, Kazakh women actively followed the Soviet women's emancipation policies and participated in the labour market equally with men relative to other Central Asian women (Heer & Youseff, 2018). For example, Tajik women, especially those from rural areas, were not as involved in the labour market as Kazakh women (Behzadi & Direnberger, 2020). Despite the women's emancipation policy, the Soviet administration's perception of gender equality was superficial, as women were still expected to perform most of the domestic duties, while men, in contrast, were distanced from them (Kandiyoti, 2007). Besides, women were primarily involved in low-paid jobs such as teaching (Belova, 2011).

After the USSR's dissolution, Central Asian states revived traditional gender norms which they associated with Islam, reinforcing gender imbalance in favour of men (Thibault, 2021). This welcomed women to be housewives and to engage less in the labour market (Commercio,

2015). In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, girls' participation in school education was lower than boys in the early post-Soviet stage (Silova & Abdushukurova, 2009), and in Kazakhstan, women are still underrepresented and marginalised in the high-paid STEM field (CohenMiller et al., 2021). While Kazakhstan has been relatively ahead in gender equality (UNDP, 2022), previous studies still report significant gender disparity and stereotyped gender roles in school textbooks (Durrani et al., 2022; Fedosseyev, 2022; Palandjian et al., 2018), along with an ethnically oriented nation-building policy that prioritises titular Kazakh ethnicity (Asanova, 2007). Uzbekistani and Tajikistani textbooks also appear to praise titular ethnicities through their history narratives (Blakkisrud & Nozimova, 2010; Ersanli, 2002).

The current study aims to analyse the broader picture of gender disparities, considering their intersection with other forms of social marginalisation, particularly ethnicity, with a focus on Kazakhstan and its 'politicised' history textbooks. For this, I frame my multi-layered discourse analysis within the 4Rs framework.

The 4RS in Textbook Gender Discourses

Using the Political Economy of Education Research (PEER) perspective, this study applies the 4Rs framework to explore the impact of inequalities on social cohesion across different domains in crisis- or conflict-affected contexts. The 4Rs framework, proposed by Novelli et al. (2017), includes four dimensions requiring amendments: redistribution—ensuring access to knowledge for all, representation—involving all the stakeholders in decision-making in education, recognition—acknowledging diverse identities in the educational system and reconciliation—promoting understanding and respect between social groups. This framework is applicable to the study of Kazakhstan, a post-Soviet multiethnic country with dominating titular Kazakhs, then Russians, Uzbeks, Ukrainians, and others (Bureau of national statistics, 2023). The country is going through post-colonial transformation and has experienced several interethnic conflicts since independence (Tabaeva et al., 2021). The co-existence of these ethnicities and cultures is expected to be projected in history textbooks, and to study this issue through a gender lens, I use the 4Rs' adaptation to gender analysis suggested by Durrani and Halai (2018).

Redistribution

History textbooks can create hegemonic discourses on gender in which women are not portrayed as agents of change. Thus, they are mostly portrayed in domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning, and child caring or stereotypically 'feminine' occupations such as teachers and healthcare specialists, while men are depicted in higher professional jobs and more important roles in society across multiple school textbooks in Kazakhstan (Durrani et al., 2022; Palandjian et al., 2018). Such portrayal can limit career guidance and socially active role models for girls.

The scarcity of knowledge about prominent women may reveal deeper knowledge gaps in textbooks, with pupils receiving limited information about female role models at one grade while completely excluding them at the next level. This raises the question about the fair distribution of knowledge. Additionally, girls may be deprived of knowledge about representatives of their identities, such as ethnicity (Kazakh and non-Kazakh) or language (Kazakh or Russian), despite the multiethnicity of Kazakhstani society. Kazakhstani education, overall, is inclined to be ethnically oriented and prioritises Kazakh language speakers (Bekzhanova & Makoelle, 2022). Given the multidimensionality of discrimination, I adopt an intersectional view of gender offered by Isakovic (2018), who argues that gender should not be treated as the only factor which affects inequalities, and other intersecting identities, such as race, social class, age, and ethnicity also shape asymmetries. Accordingly, my analysis investigates whether gender intersects with ethnic identities to exacerbate the scarcity of knowledge about certain characters in historical narratives in school textbooks.

Recognition

Recognition or recognitive justice refers to the respect and validation of different identities, backgrounds, and experiences in society (Novelli et al., 2017). It is especially important for multicultural Kazakhstan since it fosters peace between diverse groups. However, previous studies focusing on gender have shown that women are not given enough recognition as successful figures in science, politics, and other stereotypically 'masculine' domains (Durrani et al., 2022; Fedosseyev, 2022; Palandjian et al., 2018). They are often depicted in relation to men and considered

inferior to them. None of these works, however, examine the issue of recognition of other intersected identities such as ethnicity, social class, or language in history textbooks.

Representation

Representation is important to understand how the voices of all stakeholders in producing history textbooks are heard. One of the key stakeholders in compiling relevant content for history textbooks is the Kazakhstani Government. It aims to promote inclusive education (Kazakhstan, 2007) and gender equality in society (Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019). However, it is unknown whether the voice of this stakeholder, the Kazakhstani Government, is actually heard while producing the history textbooks since, as Dukeyev (2023) argues, history textbook authors in Kazakhstan write about the past without external pressures or control from policymakers.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation, according to Novelli et al. (2017), means mitigating social inequities in the past and creating a more just society. In terms of gender, Durrani and Halai (2018) argue that it is crucial to reduce the association of hegemonic masculinities with violence and promote mutual understanding in society. Meanwhile, school curriculum often promotes aggression as the ideal trait of a man and encourages gender-based violence against women (Durrani, 2008). Similarly, it is unclear how the ideal masculinity is portrayed in Kazakhstani history textbooks and whether they also perpetuate violence and threaten security. This gap needs investigation.

Methodology

The gaps in gender scholarship in Kazakhstani school curriculum raise the following research question:

> How is gender enacted across history textbooks of different levels (i.e. grade 7th–11th) in Kazakhstani schools?

Does the language of the textbooks (i.e. Kazakh and Russian) influence gender representations and inclusion/exclusion issues?

I respond to the above questions by using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) and quantitative methods.

I employed MCDA as a tool for my qualitative analysis. In this approach, all modes of discourse, including text, image, sounds, etc., contribute to meaning-making and should be considered (Jewitt, 2008; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Here, I explore the link between the meanings communicated through texts and images in history textbooks. While both modes do not have to be congruent, they can complement each other. Images can reveal more hidden ideas of the discourse since they offer wider options for interpretation (van Leeuwen, 2008). I chose Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) since it aligns with the 4Rs framework of this study. CDA focuses on social inequalities, discrimination, and exclusion/inclusion issues in political and social contexts (Fairclough, 2010; Van Dijk, 1993). Among diverse methods of CDA, I narrowed down to van Leeuwen's (2008) social actor analysis for both discourse modes, i.e. text and images.

Van Leeuwen (2008) posits that social actors are discourse participants who can and cannot be 'agents' (active doers) (p.23). In this case, the icons and other characters in the history textbook discourses were viewed as social actors in alignment with my analytical tool. How textbook authors represent social actors—through inclusion or exclusion—sheds light on the attitude of a discourse producer to the actors, as well as social hierarchies in the discourse (Darics & Koller, 2019). Precisely, I focused on gender hierarchies.

First, I performed a basic quantitative analysis, counting social actors in the textbooks. To explore the relationship between gender and ethnic bias, I created a table with columns for Kazakh males and non-Kazakh males, Kazakh females, and non-Kazakh females in textbooks both in Kazakh and Russian. I divided the actors roughly into Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs without any clarification of the ethnicities of the latter. Then, I counted the number of social actors presented for each ethnic and gender group in the textbooks. Each social actor was counted only once in the text, even if they were mentioned in other chapters.

In the qualitative stage, I aimed to verify or refute my findings from the quantitative analysis. For this, I conducted a social actor analysis of the

modes, summarising each chapter and noting instances of gender-based and intersected exclusions and inclusions of social actors. The analysis was conducted comparatively in both Kazakh and Russian textbooks of the same grade, chapter by chapter, to detect discrepancies in representations and suggest corrections.

The qualitative analysis provided additional insights into the quantitative findings, resulting in three themes: gender and ethnic bias, gender and language bias, and gender norms in the history textbooks.

Findings and Discussions

Gender and Ethnic Bias

The quantitative analysis demonstrates a significant gender imbalance in favour of men in the texts (Fig. 7.1). Bars 3 and 4 for Kazakh language textbooks and bars 7 and 8 for Russian language textbooks indicate that women are almost invisible. This suggests that linguistic representation of women as social actors is low. There is some difference between representing Kazakh and non-Kazakh women, but it appears to be less significant than the difference in men's representation. Therefore, gender identity seems to influence the exclusion of social actors much more than ethnicity. In contrast, the analysis of illustrations provides more controversial patterns such as the unexpected numerical dominance of Kazakh women over non-Kazakh men in grade 7 (Fig. 7.2).

Overall, women seem to be underrepresented in the images as well. However, there are some fluctuations across grades. For instance, Kazakh women (35) in grade 7 appear in images more than non-Kazakh men (19) and are almost equally presented in grade 8 (18/19). Upon conducting an in-depth visual analysis, it became apparent that while the images indeed include females, all of them are in group pictures, such as those in Figs. 7.3 and 7.4, and not in portraits, except for singer M. Shamsutdinova in 7th grade Kazakh textbook (p. 139) and an abstract Kazakh woman (p. 165).

Even in these group pictures, women are depicted engaging in stereotypically accepted activities such as doing handicrafts like felting (Fig. 7.3) and being (prospective) teachers (Fig. 7.4). Following van Leeuwen's (2008) distinction between close-up and 'long shot' visualisations of social actors (p. 138), I assume that the underrepresentation of women
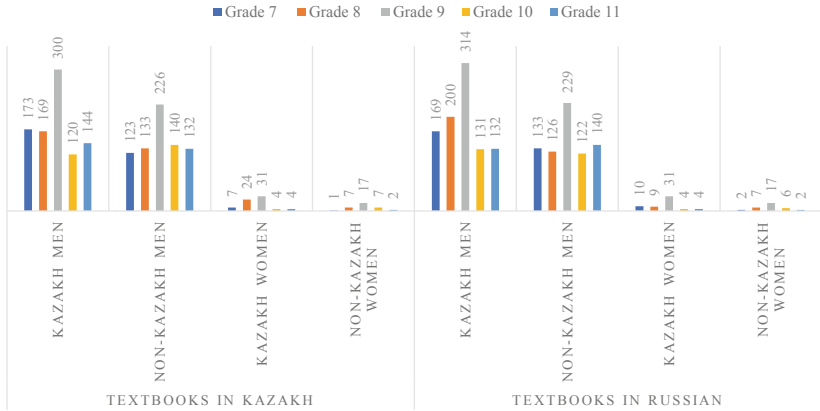
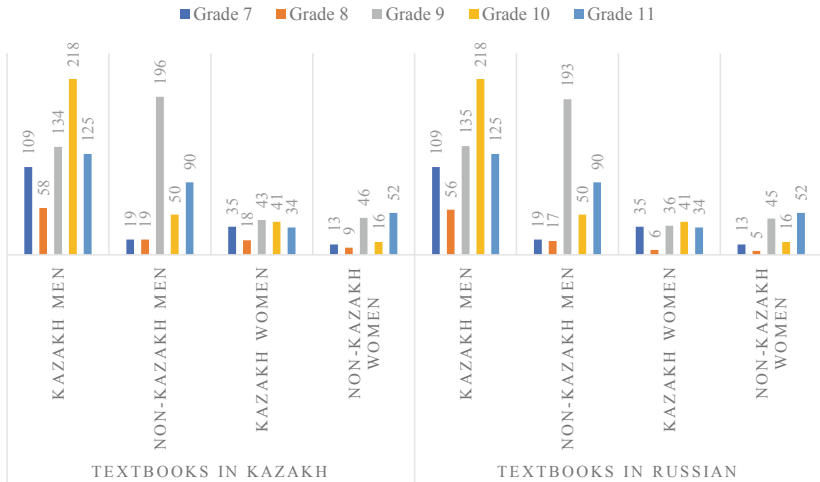**Fig. 7.1** Frequency of distribution of social actors across grades by gender and ethnicity in text

Fig. 7.2 Distribution of social actors across grades by gender and ethnicity in illustrations

Fig. 7.3 Felting (7th grade, Kazakh, p. 52)

Fig. 7.4 Kazakh pedagogical (teacher training) institute (11th grade, 2nd part, Russian, p. 125)

in portraits could indicate more preference for men whose portraits dominate.

Another observation is that non-Kazakh women are visually represented more than Kazakh females in grades 9 and 11 in both languages (Fig. 7.2). However, all those illustrations are group pictures, and some of them are not related to Kazakhstan, but rather depict events in Russia (Figs. 7.5 and 7.6). The strikes in Figs. 7.5 and 7.6 are visualised from an upper perspective, from top to down, implying a distance from the viewer's history and identity, as suggested in Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 145). The textbook narration states that the events happened at a distance, in Russia, but are closely linked to Kazakhstani history.

Generally, portraying women's social activism in these illustrations is a positive feature of the 9th grade textbooks. Non-Kazakh females here even outnumber Kazakh women (Fig. 7.2). Likewise, non-Kazakh females dominate over Kazakh ones in images for 11th grade and texts in grade 10 (due to portrayal of Russian queens) (Fig. 7.2). Nevertheless, overall,

Fig. 7.5 October revolution, 1917 (9th grade, part 1, Russian, p. 46)

Fig. 7.6 Strike of women workers of Putilov plant on the first day of the February Revolution, 1917 (9th grade, Russian, part 1, p. 41)

non-Kazakh females are still the least represented group across all the textbooks (Fig. 7.7), and their images are not close-up portraits which can imply they are not positioned as close to the viewers' identities.

Besides, non-Kazakh women are excluded as prominent figures in the Kazakhstani discourse by not being presented in close-up or portrait format. The most discriminatory textbooks are for grades 7, 8, and 11 (except images) in both Russian and Kazakh languages. Grade 10 features more non-Kazakh men and women than Kazakh ones, but this is due to the overuse of citations of famous foreign scholars such as Karl Ritter, Herodotus, and Alexander von Humboldt. Grade 11 shows more non-Kazakh than Kazakh females, but this is caused by overusing group pictures. The most gender-inclusive grades are 9 and 10, produced by Mektep.

This pattern contributes to redistribution of the 4Rs model, as girls (both Kazakh and non-Kazakh) need knowledge of successful females as role models, especially as highly appreciated heroes, social activists, professionals, and scientists. Moreover, non-titular ethnic schoolgirls require knowledge of prominent social actors of their ethnic and gender identities
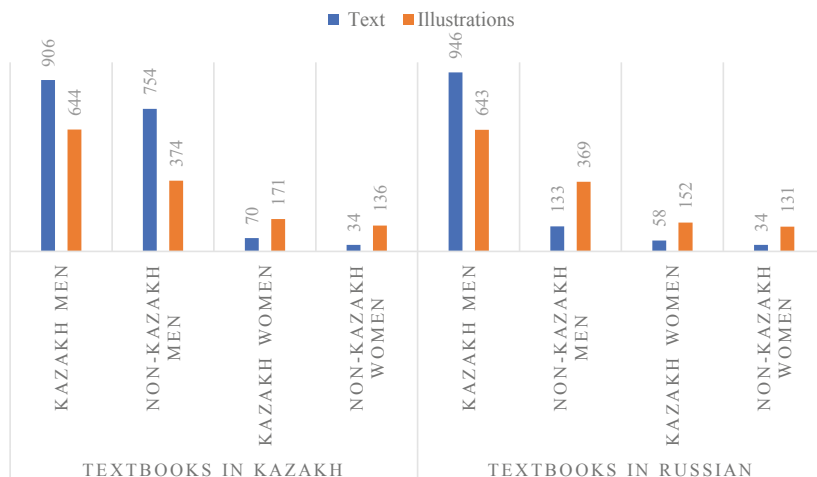
Fig. 7.7 The overall distribution of social actors based on gender and ethnicity in texts and illustrations

as role models (at least, non-Kazakhs). Similar to ethnic bias, discrimination in language can also affect gender and intersecting inequalities.

Gender and Language Bias

A comparative analysis of social actors in Kazakh and Russian language texts reveals some differences, despite the two languages appearing identical at first glance. Furthermore, the textbooks seem to be translations of each other, either from Russian into Kazakh or vice versa. Thus, one of the assignments asks students to describe their favourite writers and artists in the essay (Table 7.1).

In Kazakh, not all nouns have inherent lexical gender. This is particularly evident in the case of professions or occupation nouns. In general, Kazakh does not form feminine equivalents for professions by changing the endings or using different forms of the noun. The only possible way to emphasise a feminine gender is adding the word '*әйел*' ('*female*') before the noun, for instance, '*әйел құрылысшы*' ('*female builder*') and '*әйел дәрігер*' ('*female doctor*'). This construction emphasises the gender which may not always be relevant or necessary.

Table 7.1 An example of linguistic bias

Original Text	English Translation
Kazakh: Ұсынылған тақырыптардың бірін таңдап, эссе жазыңдар: «Менің сүйікті жазушым», «Менің сүйікті суретшім»	Choose one of the topics and write an essay: 'My favourite writer', 'My favourite artist'
Russian: Напишите эссе на любую из предложенных тем: «Мой любимый казахский (казахстанский) писатель», «Мой любимый казахский (казахстанский) художник»	Write an essay on any of the suggested topics: 'My favourite Kazakh (Kazakhstani) writer', 'My favourite Kazakh (Kazakhstani) artist'

Source 10th grade, Kazakh, p. 240 and Russian, p. 242

In contrast, the Russian language has the capacity to form feminine nouns out of masculine ones. However, in most cases, this capacity is not used, and a masculine noun is used as a generic default to include both genders. Consequently, contemporary Russian is criticised for being gender insensitive, and these days linguists recommend using more feminine nouns to increase the visibility of women (Doleschal & Schmid, 2001). Similarly, text in Russian (Table 7.1) does not give students an option to include females. It asks to write about 'writers' (писатели) which is a masculine noun in plural form. Although it is used as a generic and neutral default, it would be beneficial to use the feminine form *'писательницы' (female writers)* adding the relevant suffix since this word officially exists and does not possess any negative connotation (as some Russian feminine forms of nouns on occupation do). The same critique could be applied to the use of *'художник' (artist)* in Russian. There is a possibility to use the form *'художница' (female artist)* to emphasise the option of writing about women.

I am not suggesting changing the language rules or inventing feminine nouns as practised in social and mass media. However, it might be possible to incorporate at least the officially existing feminine nouns into textbook discourses, e.g. *'казашки и казахи'* (female and male Kazakhs), *'колхозницы и колхозники'* (female and male collective farmers). The problem is that, according to the research, these default masculine nouns are primarily associated with men, not women (Doleschal, 1993; Schmid, 1998). In contrast, the Kazakh language is not gendered, so adding more feminine nouns through morphological means (suffixes), like in Russian, is not possible.

Table 7.1 poses another issue, which is the differences in translations. The Kazakh textbook prompts students to depict any writer or artist, while the Russian textbook specifies that it should be a Kazakh or Kazakhstani artist ('Kazakhstani' is in the brackets). Generally, 'Kazakhstani' implies the nation with multiple ethnicities, and distinguishing Kazakhs may suggest hidden priority to them as a titular ethnicity which could marginalise non-Kazakh pupils in Russian classes. Therefore, with respect to the redistribution of knowledge within the 4Rs framework, female social actors and those of non-Kazakh ethnicities are marginalised. To address this issue, increasing their representation and highlighting the importance of information about them are necessary. Additionally, it is crucial to examine how exactly these females and males are represented and how gender norms are taught to pupils.

Understanding of Gender Norms

Idealised Femininities

Textbook discourses portray the 'ideal' woman as weak, vulnerable, submissive, and passive. These gender norms can be communicated implicitly in the textbooks. Discourse producers highlight passiveness and submissiveness by placing social actors in certain positions within the sentence. This pattern is exemplified in extract (1):

(1) *Жанқожа Кенесары Қасымұлымен туыстық қарым-қатынас орнатты. Хан оның қызына үйленді*

Zhankozha established a kinship relationship with Kenesary Kasymuli. The Khan married his daughter" (7th grade, Kazakh, p. 101)

Here, Zhankozha's daughter is depicted as an object in the sentence, not a subject, despite the fact that marriage is an action that requires the participation of both partners. Following van Leeuwen's (2008, pp. 30–31) explanation, this backgrounding of the woman as a social actor suggests that the marriage was not her decision, but rather that of her father due to his political interests. Otherwise, the sentence could be '*Khan and Zhankozha's daughter got married*'.

This pattern of discourse is confirmed in images as well, which often illustrate women as victims and a weak social group (Figs. 7.8 and 7.9).

Fig. 7.8 A woman in famine is holding her starving child (8th grade, Kazakh, p. 98)

The stigma surrounding women's passiveness, however, is occasionally mitigated in certain discourses where women perform as prominent icons. As such, extract (2) presents Saka queens Tomiris and Zarina with admiration highlighting their exceptional status and achievements:

(2) *В сакском обществе у женщин был высокий статус….царица Зарина не только успешно воевала с «варварами», но и основала несколько городов, а царица Томирис возглавляла свое царство в войне против персов.*

Fig. 7.9 People deported to Kazakhstan from the borders of the Soviet Union (11th grade, Russian, p. 113)

> *In the Saka society, women had a high status…Queen Zarina not only successfully fought against the "barbarians", but also founded several cities, and Queen Tomiris led her kingdom in the war against the Persians* (9th grade, Russian, p. 105)

This chapter devotes special attention and space to these women, who are positioned as the direct ancestors of Kazakhs. Notably, their accomplishments are framed in stereotypically 'masculine' domains, such as fighting against barbarians, founding cities, and leading the kingdom into war. This representation signals that women are recognised as prominent figures mostly when they possess so-called 'masculine' abilities. Although some prominent women are represented in the 9th grade, there are still not enough of them, which raises the issue of recognising women in the Kazakhstani history discourse. Additionally, one of the mentioned prominent non-Kazakh women is Nataliya Sats in extract (3).

> (3) …. *усилиями сосланной в Алма-Ату Наталии Сац в столице Казахстана появился Театр юного зрителя…..* (10th grade, Russian, p. 229)

> *.... with the efforts of Nataliya Sats, who had been deported to Alma-Ata, in*
> *the capital of Kazakhstan there appeared a Theatre of the Young Spectator...*
> (10th grade, Russian, p. 229)

However, the female social actor is not presented as a subject, but the attribute to the subject 'efforts', implying that her efforts were not the only ones that established the theatre. Furthermore, there is a discrepancy between the Russian and Kazakh textbooks, with the Kazakh version providing only the first letter of her name (Н. Сац), which does not enable readers to identify her gender. This difference between the Kazakh and Russian textbooks is unfair because Kazakh-speaking pupils may not realise that the social actor is a woman, especially a non-Kazakh woman. An accompanying illustration could be helpful to reveal Sats' gender, but no image is provided. This raises the problem of recognition of all social groups, as emphasised in the 4Rs model. The marginalisation of non-Kazakh females in textbooks is a problem that should be resolved. The following prominent non-Kazakh women could be included in the textbook: athletes O. Shishigina and E. Rybakina, or a geologist T. Koshkina. As indicated, feminine identities are often described stereotypically with acknowledgement based on 'masculine' abilities such as fighting, establishing a kingdom. Acknowledgement of females also varies based on ethnicity. Recognition for men, however, relies on different gender norms.

Hegemonic Masculinity

In history textbooks, an 'ideal' man is illustrated as strong, powerful, active and decisive, and a leader, warrior, social activist, or a scientist. This confirms previous studies on textbooks from diverse curriculum areas (Durrani et al., 2022; Palandjian et al., 2018).

An eye-catching pattern in history textbooks is that aggression, war, and conflict are associated with men. Although there are a few women warriors (Tomiris, Zarina, A. Moldagulova, etc.), even they are not visualised as agents in real battles. Their positions in images are such that viewers look up at them and admire them as role models (Fig. 7.10) (van Leeuwen, 2008, pp. 139–141).

Thus, women are not associated with violence as much as men, whose images are often depicted in battle scenes like in Fig. 7.11.

Fig. 7.10 Kazakh female soldiers A. Moldagulova and M. Mametova (8th grade, Kazakh, p. 150)

In this regard, texts are congruent with illustrations. In extract (4), for instance, a prominent icon Abulkhair Khan's violence is praised as a positive feature:

(4) *Әбілқайыр хан …. қалмақтарға қарсы бірнеше <u>жеңісті жорық жасады</u>,…. Түркістан қаласына жетіп, оны тікелей <u>шабуылмен азат етті</u>,…жоңғарларға қарсы бірнеше <u>сәтті жорық жасады</u>. Осы кезде оның <u>ұйымдастырушылық таланты</u>, …<u>қаһарман ерлігі</u> айқын танылды.*

Abulkhair Khan …. conducted several victorious <u>invasions of Kalmyks</u>,…. reached the city of Turkestan and liberated it <u>by a direct attack</u>,…. made several <u>successful invasions of Dzungars</u>. At this time, his <u>organisational talent</u>, ….and <u>personal heroism</u> were clearly recognised. (7th grade, Kazakh, pp. 17–18)

Бұланты-Білеуті шайқасы.
Р. Қожағұлованың суреті

Fig. 7.11   The Battle of bulanty-bilenti (7th grade, Kazakh, p. 21)

Although the extract depicts invasions as defence and response to the enemies, this cannot mitigate Abulkhair's violence. He performs as a foregrounded agentive social actor who initiated the invasions. The use of positive adjectives like '*successful*' and '*victorious*', as well as phrases like '*organisational talent*', etc., reinforces the message. This can contribute to the normalisation of masculine violence.

To mitigate the praise of violence, the use of a modal verb such as 'have to' and backgrounding Abulkhair as a social actor could be useful.

For example, '*The army under Abulkhair's subjugation had to invade them in response*' (Kazakh: '*Әбілқайыр басшылығындағы әскер оларға жауап ретінде жорық жасауға мәжбүр болды*' and Russian: '*Армия в подчинении Абулхаира была вынуждена сделать ответное нашествие*'). This issue relates to the reconciliation domain of the 4Rs' framework and calls for the replacement of violent masculinity with peaceful masculinity (Durrani & Halai, 2018, p. 30). Promoting aggression as a normal and even positive feature for men is not desirable in educating pupils.

Conclusions

Multimodal CDA was used to explore two research questions. The first question investigated the enactment of gender across different school textbooks. The study found that non-Kazakh females are the least represented, while Kazakh males are the most represented groups in the historical discourse across different school textbooks. Meanwhile, gender is a bigger marker of discrimination than ethnicity. Different level textbooks exclude women to varying extents, with textbooks for 9th and 10th grades being the most symmetrical, and those for grades 7th and 8th being the most asymmetrical. The 11th grade textbook by Atamura publisher shows a relatively fair balance only in illustrations, that warrants further investigation on differences in presenting gender between the publishers. Even though Mektep publisher seems to promote gender equality more than Atamura, this needs further verification with a larger sample. Moreover, the most egalitarian 9th grade textbook includes one non-Kazakh female co-author, unlike the other texts which do not include any ethnic minority female co-author, suggesting the inclusion of an ethnic minority female co-author might positively impact ethnic and gender equality, although further examination involving more authorship teams is needed.

The second research question concerned how the language of a textbook influences gender and ethnic discrimination or equality. My analysis indicates that language affects gender and ethnic bias. Russian is a gendered language, and it can create separate nouns to indicate females' identities and occupations. However, textbooks predominantly use masculine nouns as a default, therefore excluding women. One flaw of the textbooks is their prioritisation of Kazakhs and backgrounding other ethnicities (Kazakhstanis), as seen through discrepancies in the translation

of social actors. This can make Russian-speaking non-Kazakh pupils feel alienated from their national identity.

Furthermore, language used in the texts reinforces traditional gender roles, with femininity associated with vulnerability and submissiveness, whereas masculinity is linked to power and leadership. Paradoxically, textbooks pay more attention to female characters when they demonstrate stereotypically masculine traits such as power, leadership, and militancy. Besides, ethnicity affects the presentation of prominent women: The Russian language textbook that mentions a prominent non-Kazakh female does not even include her picture, while the Kazakh one does not even reveal her gender textually by withholding her first name. Such translation discrepancies further contribute to the exclusion of ethnic minority women.

In addition, the textbooks also glorify violence by associating it with 'ideal' masculinity and using positive adjectives to describe it. This not only enhances the dominance of male leaders, but also hinders efforts towards peace and social cohesion among pupils. It is clear that redistribution of knowledge or portrayal is necessary to reduce gender disparity and increase the inclusion of non-Kazakh females in particular. Recognition of their contributions is essential, and all stakeholders' voices should be represented, including the government's interest in promoting gender equity. Furthermore, reconciliation entails reducing the glorification of violence and its association with masculinity, and updating the content in collaboration with linguists and visual analysts.

In summary, the study highlights the need for a more inclusive and balanced gender and ethnic representation in Kazakhstani school textbooks and a critical analysis of the discriminatory language and illustrations which can threaten peace in the country.

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Medium of Instruction, National Identity and Attitudes Towards Gender Roles in Kazakhstan

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INTRODUCTION

Central Asian countries achieved independence relatively recently due to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which in turn brought the process of nation-building and the construction of national identity to the core of education processes. As a key institution of socialization directly controlled by the state, and one of the vital instruments involved in state-formation (Gellner, 2006), education might be viewed as one of the major vehicles for the construction of new national identities. A cross-national study involving 22 countries in Asia showed that Central Asian countries, including Kazakhstan, emphasize belonging to the country, patriotism and the love for the Motherland in educational policies and curricula (MGIEP, 2017).

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Since independence, several national identity discourses have been circulating in the country. These discourses include Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness and transnationalism (Laruelle, 2014). Certain social groups in the country might engage more with certain discourses (Aitymbetov et al., 2015). Particularly, the discourse of ethnic nationalism (Smith, 1991) with the narratives of ethnic nationhood based on ethnic attachment, pride and superiority might be more appealing to the Kazakh-language-dominant population. Similarly, the Russian-language-dominant population might favour the discourse of civic nationalism (Smith, 1991) with the narratives of inclusive nationhood based on citizenship, and respect for the country's laws and political institutions.

Language is one of the core elements of national identity. Whether civic or ethnic, national identity is always gendered (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989), and men and women are often allocated specific roles and functions in the context of nationalism. For instance, cultural and biological reproduction of the nation is viewed as a task for women, whereas men are expected to protect the nation. In contrast to existing literature, which has explored nation-building and language (Burkhanov, 2020; Eschment & De Cordier, 2021; Fedorenko, 2012; Kesici, 2011; Mkrtchyan, 2014; Sharipova et al., 2017), and nation-building and attitudes towards gender (Belafatti, 2019; Kudaibergenova, 2016b; Kudaibergenova, 2018; O'Neil, 2020; Salimjan, 2017) separately, this chapter attempts to explore all three—language, national identity and gender—in the context of education. The study examines if there is a difference in national identity and attitudes towards gender roles between university students studying in Kazakh-medium and Russian-medium groups. The study also explores students' experiences of encountering narratives of national identity and gender at both secondary and tertiary levels.

Although no literature exists on the relationship between attitudes towards gender roles and medium of instruction (MoI) in Kazakhstan, the research indicates that young people in Kazakhstan vary in their attitudes towards gender roles (Tatkeyeva, 2018; Urbayeva, 2019). Since attitudes towards gender roles are often shaped and maintained through education, classroom practices, textbooks and teacher beliefs (Arystanbek, 2021; Blumberg, 2009; Kollmayer et al., 2018; Pavlenko & Piller, 2008; Sunderland, 2000), students educated through different languages of instruction, involving different textbooks, classroom cultures

and teachers, might have different attitudes towards gender roles, as highlighted by international research (Corson, 1992; Foroutan, 2012).

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Nation-Building in Kazakhstan

Existing scholarship on nation-building in Kazakhstan mainly discusses civic and ethnic nation-building policies and national identity narratives (Burkhanov, 2020; Eschment & De Cordier, 2021; Fedorenko, 2012; Kesici, 2011; Sharipova et al., 2017). As stated previously, civic nationhood is described here as inclusive nationhood based on citizenship, and respect for the country's laws and political institutions, whereas ethnic nationhood is based on ethnic attachment, pride and superiority (Smith, 1991).

Brubaker (2011) describes post-Soviet countries as "nationalizing states", with the state policies being focused on "the distinction between core or titular nationality and others; the claim to titular primacy; and the diagnosis of titular weakness; the call for remedial state action; and the justification in terms of compensation" (p. 1788). After gaining independence, post-Soviet Central Asian countries are characterized by the introduction of new language policies, and the revival of Islam and national heritage (Beyer & Finke, 2019; Laruelle, 2007; Yerekesheva, 2020; Zhussipbek et al., 2020). However, as the most Russified of the Central Asian states, with a large number of ethnic Russians and other smaller ethnic minority groups, Kazakhstan adopted more cautious and ambiguous nation-building policies. Unlike Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, which chose ethnic nation-building policies (Sharipova & Burkhanov, 2021), Kazakhstan established a civic "Kazakhstani" national identity that emphasizes multiculturalism, interethnic harmony and stability and belonging irrespective of ethnic background (Burkhanov, 2020). The Kazakh language as a state language is an essential component of this new supranational identity, and the government is strengthening the state language through Kazakhization, renaming streets and cities into the Kazakh language, ethnic repatriation, establishing a requirement for Kazakh language proficiency for civil service and increasing the number of Kazakh-medium schools (Mkrtchyan, 2014; Zeveleva, 2014). The Kazakhstani supranational identity model is borrowed from the Soviet-style national identity model, which promoted the identity of the "Soviet

people" in the USSR through the brotherhood of the Soviet Republics and the culture and language of the majority ethnic group (Tutumlu & Imyarova, 2021).

Different discourses of this complex model circulate in Russian-speaking and Kazakh-speaking media (Burkhanov, 2020; Kudaibergenova, 2016a, 2019; Tussupova, 2010), with the discourse of ethnic nationalism, particularly dominant in the Kazakh language aimed at Kazakh-speaking audience, whereas the discourse of civic nationalism prominent in the Russian language, targeting the Russian-speaking audience (Burkhanov, 2013).

Nation-Building and Gender in Kazakhstan

One of the criticisms of the scholarship on nationalism and nationhood is the missing dimension of gender that is invisible in the scholarly literature on this topic (Hylland, 2019). Yet, nationalist narratives tend to portray men and women differently (Mayer, 2000; McClintock, 1993; Peterson, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). The main social role of women is to be able to "reproduce nations, biologically, culturally and symbolically" (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 2), whereas the major social role of men is to protect the country during the times of war and be active social players during peace times. Ethnonationalist discourses not only valorize caring and nurturing women, expect women to preserve traditions and speak the ethnic language, but also control women's bodies by insisting on biological purity. Furthermore, in contrast to the more active image of men, gendered nationalist discourses tend to produce images of women as victims, passive, weak and subordinate to men. Similar to women, the feminine image of the motherland is also often seen as fertile and in need of protection.

The scholarship on gendered nationalism in Central Asia discusses the narratives both during the Soviet times and during the independence of the states in the region (Cleuziou & Direnberger, 2016; Kandiyoti, 2007; Peshkova & Thibault, 2022). A recent study based on the discourses of feminist activists revealed several contesting discourses that touched upon "nationalism and decolonization" as well as "oppressive and emancipatory" Soviet legacy (Kravtsova, 2022, p. 83). Many scholars agree that independence and national awakening brought re-traditionalization and more conservative gender roles in Central Asia (Kudaibergenova, 2018; Suyarkulova, 2016; Werner, 2004, 2009).

While educational (Durrani et al., 2022; Palandjian et al., 2018) and media (O'Neil, 2020) discourses emphasize traditional gendered images that entertain more limiting patriarchal gender roles for women, alternative competing gendered narratives exist in cinematography, art and poetry in Central Asia (Belafatti, 2019; Kudaibergenova, 2016b; Salimjan, 2017). Unlike Uzbekistan, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, women are occasionally portrayed as strong characters and agents in state-sponsored movies and videos imbued with nationalist discourses (Belafatti, 2019).

Language, National Identity and Gender in Education

The presence of civic and ethnic nationalism as well as gendered nationalism is also reflected in education. Existing scholarship primarily explores civic and ethnic nationalism and gendered nationalist discourses and narratives in Kazakhstani textbooks (Durrani et al., 2022; Mun, 2014; Palandjian et al., 2018).

Durrani et al. (2022) reported on the absence of ethnic minorities from textbooks. Mun's (2014) study on discourses on national identity in early literacy textbooks used in Kazakh-medium and Russian-medium schools reported similar findings, with textbooks used in Russian-medium schools representing slightly more ethnic and cultural diversity than the textbooks for Kazakh MoI (see also Bekzhanova's chapter in this volume).

Textbooks in Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, contain gendered nationalist narratives that reinforce traditional gender roles (Durrani et al., 2022; Palandjian et al., 2018). Thus, early literacy textbooks in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan present women mainly in the home domain and men in the professional and public domains (Palandjian et al., 2018). Men in early literacy textbooks in Kazakhstan are portrayed as warriors and heroes, who are the central topic of the textbooks, whereas women tend to be depicted wearing traditional clothes and cradling babies, with the professional representations being limited to women teachers or nurses. Likewise, secondary school textbooks in Kazakhstan depicted gendered power relationships through a more frequent representation of men than women in imagery and texts, more importance given to men over women, biased gendered language and portraying stereotypical gender roles (Durrani et al., 2022). Similar to the gendered representations of men and women in early literacy textbooks (Palandjian et al., 2018), men in secondary school textbooks were portrayed as defenders of the nation, leaders, STEM experts, and knowledgeable

and wise characters, whereas women were mostly depicted as mothers, preserving culture and traditions, or women of idealized feminine beauty, and in need of protection (Durrani et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods embedded design as it allows to complement quantitative data with qualitative data (Creswell, 2014). The data from the survey and the interviews were used to answer the following research question: "Is there a difference in the strength of national identity and attitudes towards gender roles between students' from Kazakh-medium and Russian-medium groups"?

To collect quantitative data on national identity and attitudes towards gender roles, a questionnaire available in Kazakh and Russian was elaborated. The questionnaire included questions on demographics (seven items), and six-point Likert scales on national identity (fifteen items) and attitudes towards gender roles (twenty-one items). The items on demography included information about students' gender, year of study, home region, MoI in school, MoI at the university, fluency in the Russian language and fluency in the Kazakh language.

Scales for the national identity (fifteen items) included subscales on the strength of national identity in general (seven items), and two subscales on civic (four items) and ethnic (four items) conceptualizations of national identity. The first subscale was adapted from the existing survey instrument designed by Der-Karabetian and Ruiz (1993) and asked the students to rate the extent of their agreement with such statements as "Being a Kazakhstani plays an important part of my life", "My destiny is closely connected to the destiny of Kazakhstan", etc. The two subscales on the conceptualizations of national identity were built by borrowing some items from the existing instrument used by Sharipova et al. (2017) and developing new items. The subscales asked the students to rate how important each of the eight statements was to be Kazakhstani. Civic national identity included the following four items: "To have citizenship of Kazakhstan", "To respect political institutions and laws of the country", "To have lived in Kazakhstan for most of one's life" and "To feel Kazakhstani". The four items for ethnic national identity were: "To be able to speak Kazakh", "To be a Muslim", "To have ancestry from Kazakhstan", and "To respect Kazakh culture and uphold traditions".

To measure attitudes towards gender roles, a scale was created that borrowed items from two existing survey instruments designed by García-Cueto et al. (2015) and Lomazzi (2017), respectively. The students were asked to rate the extent of their agreement with such statements as "Women are naturally better at taking care of children than men", "Men have more rights to work amid the lack of jobs as they are primary breadwinners in their families", "Men and women should play equally important parts in politics", etc.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected during December 2022 and January 2023, once ethical approval from Ulster University and Nazarbayev University was gained. Three different universities in the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, were contacted to assist with the distribution of information about the study along with the link to the questionnaire. Since the contacted universities had groups that received instruction in the Kazakh language and groups with Russian language instruction, both students from Kazakh-medium groups and students from Russian-medium groups could be reached. The responses used for analysis had at least 70% of the survey completed and important demographics items answered. To control for the impact of ethnicity, only data from ethnic Kazakh students was analyzed.

Overall, 102 responses were used for the analysis (see Table 8.1). Internal consistency of all the scales and subscales was measured using Cronbach alpha. The data was considered reliable as Cronbach alpha comprised 0.88 for the strength of national identity, 0.77 for civic national identity, 0.79 for ethnic national identity and 0.90 for attitudes towards gender roles.

From the survey respondents, 24 students interested in sharing their experiences with the research team were selected to participate in individual semi-structured interviews (see Table 8.1). Each participant was given a unique code that contained information of the participant's MoI and gender. For instance, the six male participants with Kazakh language of instruction were given the following codes: Kz_m_1, Kz_m_2, Kz_m_3, Kz_m_4, Kz_m_5 and Kz_m_6. The interviews were used to collect qualitative data on students' national identity and attitudes towards gender roles as well as students' experiences of encountering narratives of national identity and gender roles in school environments, teachers' and students' beliefs, educational institutions or classroom culture and textbooks and materials.

Table 8.1 Socio-demographics of the research participants

	Kazakh MoI		Russian MoI		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Survey (undergraduate students, 1–4 year)	56	100	46	100	102	100
Males	23	41.07	21	45.65	44	43.14
Females	33	58.92	25	54.35	58	56.86
Interviews (undergraduate students, 3–4 year)	12	100	12	100	24	100
Males	6	50	6	50	12	50
Females	6	50	6	50	12	50

Findings

Quantitative Analysis

Independent samples t-test revealed that the scores of the students from Kazakh-medium and Russian-medium groups differed for: (a) Knowledge of languages, (b) strength of national identity and (c) attitudes towards gender roles (Table 8.2).

Table 8.2 Independent samples T-test

		Kazakh MOI		Russian MOI			
Variables	N	M	SD	M	SD	T	p
Knowledge of the Kazakh language	99	5.78	0.50	4.43	1.19	7.66	0.000
Knowledge of the Russian language	99	5.09	1.02	5.80	0.45	−4.38	0.000
Strength of national identity	98	33.55	6.19	28.04	6.87	5.50	0.000
Civic	100	16.21	4.40	13.23	3.94	3.56	0.001
Ethnic	100	16.14	4.89	11.41	3.99	5.27	0.000
Attitudes towards gender roles	86	64.69	14.74	55.29	15.75	2.95	0.004

Table 8.3 Paired samples T-test

Language of instruction	Df	Civic national identity		Ethnic national identity		T	p
		M	SD	M	SD		
Kazakh	55	16.21	4.40	16.14	4.89	0.14	0.887
Russian	45	13.23	3.95	11.41	3.99	3.09	0.003

The scores for self-reported knowledge of Kazakh were higher for students studying at the university in Kazakh-medium groups than the scores of students from Russian-medium groups, $t(99) = 7.66$, $p < 0.001$. Similarly, students who studied at the university in Kazakh-medium groups reported lower knowledge of the Russian language compared to students from Russian-medium groups, $t(99) = -.38$, $p < 0.001$.

Participants from Kazakh-medium groups felt stronger about national identity, compared to participants from Russian-medium groups, $t(98) = 5.50$, $p < 0.001$. Students from Kazakh-medium groups also attached significantly more importance to both civic and ethnic components of national identity than students from Russian-medium groups, $t(100) = 3.56$, $p = 0.001$ and $t(100) = 5.27$, $p < 0.001$, respectively. Furthermore, paired samples t-test (Table 8.3) revealed that students in Russian-medium groups attached more importance to the civic rather than ethnic component of national identity, $t(45) = 3.09$, $p = 0.003$.

Finally, significant differences were found between Kazakh and Russian MoI in attitudes towards gender roles, $t(86) = 2.95$, $p = 0.004$. Students studying at the university in Kazakh had more traditional gender roles attitudes than students studying in the Russian language.

Qualitative Analysis

National Identity in School and University
When asked about events on patriotism and national identity at school and at university, participants from Kazakh-medium groups reported having a variety of patriotic events at school and mentioned a few at the university. Most of these events were related to the Kazakh language and poetry and included performances, plays, contests, and events devoted to commemorating important historical events and Kazakh poets. For

instance, one of the girls (Kz_f_4) who is receiving her education in the Kazakh language shared:

> For example, we wrote a lot of essays devoted to Abay [Kazakh poet]. At that time, I participated in different contests, such as expressive readings, essay writing, and reading monologues. When I won, I felt patriotic because I won something in Kazakh. If I read a monologue in Kazakh, write a poem in Kazakh, and receive a certificate reading it, I gain a special feeling.

Later in the interview, the participant also said: "At school, patriotism was linked to language. It is necessary to know the Kazakh language, Kazakh poets. It is necessary to learn the vocabulary of the Kazakh language well". A male student from a Kazakh-medium group (Kz_m_ 3) even said that he had written his own poem devoted to patriotism and cited a verse from it during the interview. Another male participant from a Kazakh-medium group (Kz_m_4) added: "I consider it patriotic to teach glorifying the Kazakh language for those studying in Kazakh. I also consider it important to conduct classes in this way for Russian speakers and ethnic Russians. I mean to conduct classes that foster patriotism".

Interestingly, when asked about events devoted to patriotism, participants from Russian-medium groups talked mostly only about classroom hours, except for one female student from a Russian-medium group (Ru_ f_5), who gave a bigger range of events such as concerts, exhibitions, charity work and round tables. The content of classroom hours that students from Russian-medium groups discussed with their teachers was less focused on language and more on civic attributes such as national currency, constitution and inclusivity of other ethnicities. For instance, a female student from a Russian-medium group (Ru_f_3) said: "During the classroom hours there was a short summary of how we gained independence, how many ethnicities overall live in the country". Another female student from a Russian-medium group (Ru_f_1) shared: "We had classroom hours. We remembered important dates, connected to the independence, transitioning to using national currency".

Several participants stated that students from Kazakh-medium groups are more patriotic than students from Russian-medium groups. For instance, a female student from Russian MoI (Ru_f_1) shared:

> At the university, it [patriotism] is discussed more in Kazakh-medium groups. And our teachers also told us that Kazakh-medium groups are more active in terms of this. Roughly speaking, Kazakh-medium groups are more patriotic. They tend to be involved in this type of activities and so on.

Patriotism at the universities was often linked to language and several participants also mentioned that Kazakh-medium groups are better at teaching and transferring Kazakh culture and language. For instance, a male student from a Kazakh-medium group (Kz_m_6) said: "For Kazakhs, living on their own land, talking in their native language is already patriotism. I don't notice it much among students from Russian-medium groups".

Gender Roles Attitudes at School and University
The majority of participants noticed more expectations from girls in terms of academic achievement, effort, diligence and attendance at universities and schools. Interestingly, four female students also mentioned restrictions for girls in terms of appearance such as clothes and hair in Kazakh-medium schools. Thus, a female participant from a Kazakh-medium group (Kz_f_1) said: "There were moments in primary school, when we [girls] were not allowed to wear *shalbar* [trousers]". Another female participant from a Kazakh-medium group (Kz_f_4) also shared her experience studying at school:

> Girls were very strongly judged. We wore skirts, and they had to be below our knees. Girls also wore collared shirts, which sometimes had shiny stones on them. Then they [teachers] said: "Why are you wearing a shiny shirt? Why are you plucking your eyebrows? They are already adults, they need a guy." Honestly, that's what they said in our school. Girls were forced to stand in front of everyone, and they said: "This girl wore a short skirt, shiny tights. Her hair is not in two braids. Her hair is in a bun."

Two girls who studied in Kazakh-medium groups in school also talked about how teachers expect girls to behave in relation to the concept of purity of blood and nationalism. For instance, one of these participants (Kz_f_2) shared: "Mostly at school patriotism was like this: 'You need to speak Kazakh', 'You need to interact only with Kazakhs', 'You are Kazakh girls, you should marry Kazakh guys.' And at home it is the same".

Similarly, only participants from Kazakh-medium groups talked about the use of *uyat*, or shame, used by teachers to regulate girls' behaviour in schools. Thus, one of the male students from a Kazakh-medium group (Kz_m_6) remembered what he heard teachers saying to girls: "It's *uyat* [shame] for girls. Do not go out too much. Do not do this or that. Study well. Do not date guys".

Eight participants stated that they noticed more freedom and gender equality in Russian-medium classrooms compared to Kazakh-medium classrooms. For instance, a female student from a Russian-medium group (Ru_f_1) shared: "Well, in Kazakh-medium groups, boys, they somehow feel a certain superiority in the group, they put themselves above girls. And they demonstrate this attitude, maybe consciously, maybe unconsciously". A male student from a Kazakh-medium group (Kz_m_3) also said:

> In Russian groups, girls talk openly, they can talk about anything that is on their mind. And in Kazakh-medium groups, it's not that they are reserved, but some things are not talked about, some topics are not touched, and they don't talk about it. In Russian-medium groups, girls… feminism… how to explain… they openly express their opinion.

Six participants reported having more discussions about gender equality at the universities than at schools. The participants mentioned courses about gender, and conversations about gender with their classmates. Although most participants reported instances of gendered treatment of students at the universities, there were more occasions mentioned by students from Kazakh-medium groups. For instance, one of the male students from a Kazakh-medium group (Kz_m_1) shared the following when talking about university teachers grading his task at the university:

> I completed two tasks correctly, but I could not fully complete one of the tasks. I was told they would give me 75 points. Then, when I was on my way to my seat, they said, "Wait. You look like a guy who will become a leader". So, just like that, they gave me 90 points. On my way back to my seat, the girls devoured me with their eyes. [with anger]

A similar example of university teachers not expecting much from female students was provided by a female student from a Kazakh-medium group (Kz_f_2). Here, she is talking about teachers and their expectations from girls at her university: "… they talk about work, but not so much

about success in a career or school. They say, 'study, get a job close to your home', that's about it. More realistic, but not particularly motivating. Not much is expected". A student from a Russian-medium group (Ru_ f_5) also noticed: "In Russian-medium groups, mostly there's equality between boys and girls. In the Kazakh-medium groups there was a power imbalance in favor of boys, because they… how to put it, teachers liked them more".

Discussion

Quantitative findings revealed that students from Kazakh-medium groups were more proficient in the Kazakh language and had a stronger sense of national identity than students from Russian-medium groups. Qualitative analysis complemented this data, showing that students from Kazakh-medium groups reported having a lot of events on patriotism, most of which were focused on elements of ethnic national identity such as language, poetry and literature. Students from Russian-medium groups reported much fewer events on patriotism in school, with the content of these events primarily focused on civic elements of national identity. This also explains the quantitative finding that students from Russian-medium groups had attached more importance to civic conceptualization of national identity compared to ethnic elements of national identity. The results on national identity reflect the findings of the studies that reported more ethnically inclusive textbooks for Russian-medium groups compared to Kazakh-medium groups (Mun, 2014), and ethnonationalist discourse in literature textbooks for Kazakh-medium groups (Asanova, 2007). The results also go in line with the scholarship on different national identity discourses circulating in Kazakh- and Russian-speaking environments (Burkhanov, 2013, 2020; Kudaibergenova, 2016a, 2019; Tussupova, 2010). Strong attachment to both civic and ethnic national identity components for students from Kazakh-medium groups might be explained by Kazakhness and Kazakhstaniness being intertwined (Laruelle, 2014). Weaker attachment of Russian-medium students compared to Kazakh-medium students to the civic component of national identity might also be explained by the fact that Kazakh as a state language is an important symbolic marker of "Kazakhstani" civic national identity.

Quantitative findings showed that students from Kazakh-medium groups had more traditional attitudes towards gender roles than students

from Russian-medium groups. Qualitative analysis complemented quantitative data, showing that students perceived Russian-medium groups to have more freedom for female students to express their opinions and a better classroom climate regarding gender equality. More restrictions for girls regarding dress code and hair were reported in Kazakh-medium schools. Some of these restrictions were related to the concept of purity of blood central to ethnic nationalism. Another qualitative finding was the use of *uyat*, or shaming in Kazakh-medium schools, which was used to regulate behaviour of students, including female students' behaviour, in the educational settings. The finding goes in line with the literature that states that the culture of shame in Central Asian countries is often used to regulate individual's behaviour to ensure their compliance to conservative gender norms (Thibault & Caron, 2022). More gender-equal classroom environment in Russian-medium educational settings might be explained by greater ethnic diversity in classrooms that allow more contact with Slavic ethnicities. According to Urbayeva (2019), Slavic ethnic groups in Central Asia have more egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles than titular ethnic groups.

Conclusions

This study revealed differences in the strength of national identity and its conceptualizations as well as attitudes towards gender roles reported by participants from Kazakh-medium and Russian-medium groups. These finding was also reflected in students' experiences in relation to the narratives of national identity and gender at school and university. Bridging the gap between two languages of instruction in terms of conceptualizations of national identity and attitudes towards gender roles might be useful for creating a more cohesive Kazakhstani society. Education is a powerful instrument to achieve greater gender equality and a stronger sense of national identity that reflects the governmental discourse of multiculturalism and inclusivity by means and through the common state language.

For Russian-medium institutions and classrooms, it could be achieved by providing better quality Kazakh language teaching that will provide better outcomes in terms of fluency in the language, and introducing different perspectives including decolonial ones in the classrooms, and history and literature textbooks. Better proficiency in the Kazakh language might create more room, opportunities and motivation for

Russian-medium students to participate more actively in events related to the Kazakh language, poetry and literature. Better quality teaching of the Kazakh language might also be important not only for the students of titular ethnicity in Russian-medium classrooms, but also for ethnic minority students who mainly learn the national language only in educational institutions and are not exposed to the language in their homes. Ethnic minorities have weaker feelings of pride for the country (Sharipova, 2020), possibly due to low proficiency in the Kazakh language. Providing more quality teaching of the Kazakh language in Russian-medium schools might increase the strength of belonging for this group of students in Kazakhstan and allow them to connect strongly with the national identity model introduced by the government. Decolonial perspectives might also allow students of titular ethnicity to connect closer to their ethnic core, whereas a variety of perspectives offered in the classrooms could enhance students' critical thinking.

For Kazakh-medium institutions and classrooms to adequately reflect nation-building policy, more multiculturalism and ethnic diversity might be represented in textbooks. Gender equality could be improved through indigenous Kazakh culture, portraying strong images of women such as brave and heroic female characters or the image of a woman that is contributing to the country's well-being and is not seen as inferior to men. More agency and power given to female students might allow girls to conceptualize gender and Kazakhness from a more gender-balanced lens and allow them to create a more empowered image of a woman through art, poetry, literature or filmmaking. For instance, schools might involve female students into positions where they can contest existing gender norms through cultural and literary events, or connecting to the nomadic past and highlight traditions and narratives that empower women. Teacher training for gender-sensitive teaching might also touch upon cultural elements that might ensure gender equality.

The limitation of this small-scale research is that it employed a small sample and did not consider regional differences. The differences between urban and rural schools, language in the family and language of consuming content were also not considered. Further research could continue exploring how the MoI might influence national identity and gender in education through school landscape analysis, classroom observations and collecting data from teachers and school administration.

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Access to Education and Labour Market Participation of Ethnic Minorities in Kazakhstan: The Case of Uzbeks

Fariza Tolesh

INTRODUCTION

The language policies of Central Asian countries, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, often have to deal with the challenging task of simultaneously promoting national identity, maintaining linguistic diversity, and incorporating languages of wider communication, including Russian, English, and minority ethnic group languages. Given the close link between language, identity, and ethnicity, this issue is crucial in light of the prevalence of ethnic conflicts worldwide. One example is the Kyrgyz-Uzbek interethnic conflict in Southern Kyrgyzstan (Hanks, 2011; Rezvani, 2013). Policymakers should consider the socio-economic and political situations in other Central Asian countries when addressing the language and education needs of ethnic minorities.

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Kazakhstan is home to a diverse and multicultural population and has a significant proportion of non-Kazakh communities, constituting nearly one-third of its total population. Ensuring socio-economic conditions that enable equal access to higher education and human capital development is crucial in this context. It is particularly important to explore this situation through the lens of language policies because during the process of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, language emerged as a significant factor contributing to ethnic conflicts in the former Soviet republics (Lee, 2004). Language has a critical role in ethno-politics, and language policies have been identified as a crucial factor in promoting peaceful inter-ethnic relations in Kazakhstan (Landau & Kellner-Heinkele, 2011; Lee, 2004).

Language policies can play a crucial role in managing ethnic tensions, and Kazakhstan's harmonious inter-ethnic relations have been attributed to soft language requirements for employment and higher education, tailored messaging for different ethnic groups, compromise on language titles and a mild approach to ethnic languages (Landau & Kellner-Heinkele, 2011; Lee, 2004). A unified language policy has facilitated peaceful coexistence among various nationalities and maintained national integration despite the dispersion of ethnicities across regions. However, limited research exists on the impact of language policies on ethnic Uzbeks, who are the third largest group in Kazakhstan and predominantly use Uzbek alongside Kazakh and Russian (Lee, 2004). As the proportion of Uzbeks increases, it becomes important to examine how language policies affect their socio-economic well-being, as these policies can potentially create inequalities in education and labour market access for ethnic minorities.

This could further exacerbate the situation of ethnic minorities because additionally they experience other inequalities in the labour market, such as disparities in entry into the labour market, occupation types, earnings, working hours, career progression barriers, and levels of self-employment (Zwysen et al., 2021). During the hiring process, employers tend to prefer locals to minorities due to their suspicion of lower productivity levels of ethnic minorities compared to the local population, leading to higher unemployment among minority groups (Veit & Thijsen, 2021).

This study investigates the educational opportunities for ethnic minorities within the Kazakhstani system and the relationship between their education and occupational levels through the lens of language skills and within the framework of the 4Rs. The 4Rs stand for recognition, representation, redistribution and reconciliation, a framework used to

understand the role of education in building sustainable peace in conflict and post-conflict contexts (Novelli et al., 2017). The 4Rs framework for sustainable peacebuilding in education involves addressing inequities through *redistribution* of resources and opportunities to tackle disparities in access and outcomes, *recognising* various forms of diversity, such as cultural, ethnic, linguistic, gender and age diversity, promoting *representation* through inclusive participation in governance and decision-making processes and addressing past and present injustices through *reconciliation* (Novelli et al., 2017).

There has been little scholarship examining the socio-economic situation of Uzbeks in independent Kazakhstan. This study intends to contribute to a better understanding of the role of multilingual education within minority communities in their access to further education and career development. In a country where Russian language proficiency is viewed as a persisting hegemony of the colonial language, and the level of Kazakh language skills is a sensitive nationalist concern, minority groups could be the most vulnerable groups to cultural and material anxieties related to language skills. Therefore, the research question that guided this study is: How do Uzbek, Kazakh and Russian language skills influence the access to education and labour market experiences of ethnic Uzbeks in Kazakhstan, and what opportunities and barriers do they face in the local labour market as a non-titular population?

According to the data from the Bureau of Statistics of Kazakhstan (stat.gov.kz, 2023), Kazakhstan's population has experienced significant growth since gaining independence in the 1990s, increasing from around 14 million individuals to over 19 million in 2022 (stat.gov.kz, 2023). Alongside this growth, there has been a notable shift in the ethnic composition of the population, with the proportion of Kazakhs rising from 40% in the 1990s to almost 70% in the 2020s, while the share of Slavic ethnic groups has decreased from 44 to 18%, and Uzbeks have experienced stable growth, rising from around 2% in 1990s to 3.5% in the 2020s (stat.gov.kz, 2023).

The educational landscape in Kazakhstan has also undergone significant changes over the past two decades. During the 2000s, the total number of schools decreased from 8,200 to 7,440, with the share of Kazakh-language schools increasing from 42 to 51%. Uzbek schools experienced the most significant decline, from 1% (78) in 1999 to just 0.2% (13) in 2020.

Although the number of children attending Uzbek-medium schools fell from around 87,000 in 2000 to 79,000 in 2010, it increased again to 86,000 by 2020, with the proportion of children attending Uzbek-medium schools remaining relatively constant over the past two decades at 2.7% (stat.gov.kz). In recent years, there has been an increase in the representation of ethnic Uzbeks across various tiers of post-compulsory education. In 1999, the economically active population was around 4 million, with 98,000 Uzbek ethnicity, and it rose to over 6.5 million in 2009, with 161,000 ethnic Uzbeks. In 2009, the ethnic Uzbeks were mainly employed in agriculture, trade, education, health care and construction (stat.gov.kz, 2009).

Following this introductory section, the subsequent section presents the theoretical framework and literature review. The methodology is then explained in the ensuing section, followed by the presentation of the findings. The chapter ends with a concluding section.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Two key concepts of this study are *ethnic minorities* and *bilingual/ multilingual education*. Churchill's study on linguistic and cultural definitions of ethnic minorities in 15 countries identified four key criteria for ethnic minorities: they differ from the mainstream group in ethnicity, race, language or cultural heritage; they are socially non-dominant; they reside in a country with a numerically and culturally-economically dominant group sharing a common culture and language; and ethnic minority children and youth tend to have educational problems primarily due to difficulty integrating into an educational system based on a mainstream model (Churchill, 1996).

Bilingual education involves the use of two languages in education to make students bilingual and biliterate or enhance comprehension and linguistic competence in a dominant language for language-minoritised people (Baker, 2011). Multilingual education involves using more than two languages in education, and it has become increasingly important in a globalised world where two languages may not be sufficient (Ursell, 2012).

Education and language are critical factors in creating and maintaining modern nation-states, as the pursuit of national identity often revolves around achieving linguistic and cultural dominance (May, 2012). In some cases, the significance of language to one's identity may vary widely across

individuals and groups, ranging from negative evaluation of the language, indifference, general positive evaluation and personal positive evaluation (Smolicz & Secombe, 1985). While some individuals may see a particular language as a vital element of their ethnicity, loyalty to that language may only persist if economic and social circumstances are conducive to it (Edwards, 2010). Kay (1993) supports this idea by highlighting the displacement of African languages as a means to escape poverty and the limitations imposed by ethnic identity.

Language shift is becoming more common in the modern world, as members of ethnolinguistic minorities often choose to bring up their children in the majority language, leading to the eventual displacement of the historically associated language (May, 2012). The concept of "communicative currency" or "languages of wider communication" is often used to justify the greater socio-political status of majority languages (May, 2012, p. 156). However, maintaining a minority language alongside a dominant one can require adeptness in navigating multiple cultural and linguistic identities. It is possible to retain both narrower and broader identities, and insisting on doing so can be a way of avoiding reductionism (May, 2012).

According to Parekh (1995), communities need to respect their history and traditions while meeting present and future needs when reconstituting their identity. Bilingual education can effectively promote second language learning for minority languages while maintaining their cultural and linguistic heritage. Churchill's (1996) typology is a useful tool for analysing policy responses to minority language and education (May, 2012). Six policy responses have been identified, with the first stage being the dominant approach of modern nation-states and their education systems (Churchill, 1996). These policies aim to ignore or actively suppress minority languages, viewing them as a threat to social mobility and majoritarian controlled institutions (Grant, 1997). Examples include the Irish and French state education systems, the Welsh language proscription from schools and the abandonment of Māori language in New Zealand (May, 2004). Some of these language restrictions still exist today, such as the Chinese government's ban on the Tibetan language in schools in favour of Mandarin Chinese and the Turkish state's repression of the Kurdish language (Skutnabb-Kangas & Fernandes, 2008).

In Stage 2, assimilationist education is still implemented to maintain a common language and culture, compensating for the supposed inadequacies of the minority student's family background to mitigate their

underachievement in schools (Churchill, 1996). Stage 3 policies and programmes are categorised as multicultural education, which emerged in response to the demands of minority groups in the 1970s for greater recognition of their ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity within education (Churchill, 1996). Multicultural education acknowledges that the disadvantages faced by minorities are not solely due to personal or familial factors but are also systemic. In response, multicultural education advocates for "cultural pluralism", which recognises the cultural values and practices of minorities and includes them in the school curriculum (Churchill, 1996). Stage 4 recognises the significance of the connection between language, identity and learning, but in a mostly instrumental manner, utilising transitional bilingual programmes that use a minority language.

Stage 5 acknowledges the importance of preserving minority languages and cultures while recognising the need for their active protection to prevent them from being replaced by the dominant national language (Churchill, 1996). The maintenance approach to bilingual education is a common policy response to this challenge, where school instruction is predominantly or exclusively in the minority language, ensuring that the minority language is sustained and encouraged. Successful bilingual programmes are found in various parts of the world, including North America, Europe and among different indigenous groups. Finally, Stage 6, known as the "language equality" stage, requires the dominant ethnic group to accommodate minority groups and their languages in all shared domains (Churchill, 1996). Formal multilingual policies are implemented in this stage, granting language rights to individuals or territories and ensuring the maintenance of a particular language. Belgium and Switzerland provide examples of formal multilingualism achieved via the territorial language principle, where language rights are limited to a particular territory to maintain a particular language. India is an example of the personality language principle, where language rights are granted to individuals, regardless of where they are located geographically (Beardsmore, 1980; Blommaert, 1996; Nelde, 1997).

Overall, the first four stages advocate for minority groups to pursue the same social, cultural and linguistic goals as the dominant or majority ethnic group, with little regard for minority languages and cultures. This approach was reminiscent of the Soviet era approach to local languages of the republics and Russian language dominance, seeking to integrate minority groups into the dominant civic culture of the nation-state.

Churchill ([1996]) argues that the fifth and sixth stages are the only stages that incorporate the cultural and linguistic values of minority groups into the objectives and outcomes, challenging the notion of a monocultural and monolingual society. These later stages acknowledge the importance of minority groups preserving their language and culture over time, whereas the initial four stages take the opposite approach.

The current study aims to determine at which stage of Churchill's typology Kazakhstan is situated in terms of its education and language-related policies with respect to ethnic Uzbeks. Based on the regulations related to education and language policies in Kazakhstan, as well as interviewing members of the ethnic Uzbek community, this research provides insight into Kazakhstan's approach to minority language and culture preservation.

Methodology

To answer the research questions, a qualitative research design was chosen, along with official statistics. The latter provided an overall account and trends on socio-economic indicators for minority ethnic groups in the country, with a specific focus on Uzbeks. Interviews were selected as the best method because they enable researchers to construct the experiences of ethnic minorities and gain deeper insights.

The target population for this research comprises individuals who identify as ethnic Uzbeks, born and raised in Kazakhstan, who attended school starting from 1991 when Kazakhstan gained independence and language reforms were initiated. Participants had to be below 40 years of age and be in the labour market for at least one year to help understand their education to employment transition.

The research site is Kentau, a town in the north of the Turkestan region, which is situated in South Kazakhstan. More than 92% of Uzbeks in Kazakhstan live in this region (stat.gov.kz, [2023]). Given the feasibility of attracting the appropriate participants to the study, a non-probabilistic convenient sample was chosen which involved selecting individuals who were conveniently available and willing to participate in the research. Additionally, snowball or chain sampling was applied to establish several key informants who had the required characteristics and helped identify other participants and put the researcher in touch with them.

Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interview protocol included nine open-ended questions with sub-questions, which

were pilot-tested on two participants selected from the same target population but excluded from the main data set. The first section of the questions related to the schools participants attended and their linguistic skills, while the second section related to their occupational status and employment situation. The last section addressed the current language-related policies, particularly, the trilingual policy for ethnic Uzbek children and the switch to Latin script. Kazakhstan's trilingual policy promotes an understanding of three languages, namely Kazakh, Russian and English and use these languages as languages of instruction for STEM disciplines at schools in Kazakhstan (Klyshbekova, 2020).

To ensure the clarity and relevance of the interview questions, the participants received the interview questions before the scheduled meeting and were informed that the interviews would be tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim in advance. Despite these precautions, many potential participants refused to be interviewed.

I used traditional procedures to analyse the interview data, which included coding and thematic development. I also used NVivo software for storing and analysing both the qualitative data and official statistics on minority groups. Ulster University provided ethical clearance for the study. All participants provided written consent for audio-recording the interview.

Findings

Participant Characteristics

All 20 ethnic Uzbeks interviewed were born and educated in Kazakhstan. Eleven were women and nine were men. Participants were aged between 21 and 40 years, predominantly residing in urban areas within the Turkestan region, with only two participants living in rural areas. Out of the 20 participants, 13 were married and had children, with the highest number of children being five. Eleven participants attended Uzbek-medium schools, two graduated from Kazakh-medium schools and the remainder graduated from Russian-medium schools. Only three participants did not pursue further education after secondary school, while six pursued vocational education and training, and 11 obtained higher education degrees. Participants who attended vocational education and training institutions were predominantly enrolled in Kazakh-medium groups, while those pursuing undergraduate degrees were primarily enrolled in

Russian-medium groups. This could be attributed to the regional specifications of vocational education and training institutions, which mostly offer training in the Kazakh language (Table 9.1).

During the study period, only one participant was unemployed and four participants were self-employed. The remaining 15 participants were engaged in various sectors such as telecommunication, education, medicine, different services, retail and mining. The majority of participants (11 out of 20) had a monthly income ranging between 200 to $400, while only one participant reported a monthly income close to $2,000. Notably, the average monthly income in Kazakhstan is around $630, with the average income for the Turkestan region being around $500 (stat.gov.kz, 2023), indicating that most participants earned less than the regional and country average.

Regarding language proficiency, only one participant reported not being able to speak Kazakh, three participants did not speak Uzbek, while six participants reported not knowing Russian. Thus, 14 out of 20 respondents were trilingual.

Analysis of Findings Within the 4Rs Framework

Recognition

To date, there are 13 Uzbek-medium schools in the region. Most were sent to a school closer to their home. However, none of the 20 participants chose to enrol their own children in Uzbek schools, opting instead for Russian schools. This preference for Russian schools was explained by participants' own experiences with the Russian language and their desire to protect their children from potential linguistic difficulties. Parents also chose Russian medium schools because they perceive Russian language proficiency as essential in Kazakhstan, particularly for ethnic Uzbeks. Some participants believed that Russian schools offer higher quality education as explained by Alisher "I have better knowledge than anyone who graduated with honours from Uzbek school. It is better to be a "C" student in a Russian school than an "A" student in an Uzbek school".

Parental education levels had a significant impact on the participants' educational aspirations. Participants whose parents had higher education tended to place greater value on obtaining a university degree. Whereas participants whose parents did not have higher education often had no

Table 9.1 Participant description

N	Alias	Sex	Place of residence	Age	Language of school	Type of further education	Language of further education	Employment status	Sector of employment	Self-reported proficiency in languages		
1	Umida	Female	Urban	40	Russian	HEI	Russian	Full-time	Catering	0	Russian	Uzbek
2	Rustam	Male	Urban	39	Uzbek	none	none	Self-employed	Retail	Kazakh	0	Uzbek
3	Yulduz	Female	Urban	38	Russian	HEI	Russian	Full-time	Medicine	Kazakh	Russian	0
4	Aziza	Female	Urban	37	Russian	HEI	Russian	Full-time	Education	Kazakh	Russian	Uzbek
5	Alisher	Male	Urban	36	Uzbek	HEI	Russian	Full-time	Education	Kazakh	Russian	Uzbek
6	Dilshod	Male	Urban	36	Russian	none	none	Full-time	Mining	Kazakh	Russian	Uzbek
7	Nigora	Female	Urban	34	Uzbek	HEI	Russian	Full-time	Education	Kazakh	Russian	Uzbek
8	Nilufar	Female	Urban	33	Russian/Kazakh	VET	Kazakh	Self-employed	Personal care services	Kazakh	Russian	0
9	Ulugbek	Male	Rural	31	Uzbek	HEI	Russian	Full-time	Medicine	Kazakh	Russian	Uzbek
10	Sardor	Male	Rural	30	Uzbek	HEI	Kazakh	Full-time	Telecommunication	Kazakh	Russian	Uzbek
11	Anvar	Male	Urban	30	Russian	HEI	Russian	Full-time	Telecommunication	Kazakh	Russian	Uzbek
12	Nodir	Male	Urban	30	Russian	HEI	Russian	Unemployed	Telecommunication	Kazakh	Russian	0
13	Sherzod	Male	Urban	30	Uzbek	HEI	Russian	Full-time	Education	Kazakh	Russian	Uzbek
14	Fatima	Female	Urban	28	Russian	HEI	Russian	Full-time	Education	Kazakh	Russian	Uzbek
15	Akmal	Male	Urban	25	Uzbek	none	none	Self-employed	Auto service	Kazakh	0	Uzbek
16	Nargiza	Female	Urban	23	Uzbek	VET	Kazakh	Full-time	Medicine	Kazakh	0	Uzbek
17	Zarina	Female	Urban	22	Uzbek	VET	Kazakh	Full-time	Medicine	Kazakh	0	Uzbek
18	Zuhra	Female	Urban	22	Kazakh	VET	Kazakh	Full-time	Medicine	Kazakh	0	Uzbek
19	Sitora	Female	Urban	22	Uzbek	VET	Kazakh	Full-time	Medicine	Kazakh	0	Uzbek
20	Arofat	Female	Urban	21	Uzbek	VET	Kazakh	Full-time	Medicine	Kazakh	Russian	Uzbek

clear plans for their future after graduation and had to rely on the guidance of their teachers or peers in making decisions about their education. Alisher explained why some ethnic Uzbeks obtain further education while others do not: "depends on a personality not the ethnicity…and on setting the right priorities during school by parents".

In terms of the language of instruction for higher education, the majority of participants studied in Russian medium groups. Several participants explained that Russian was taught particularly well in some Uzbek schools, and they felt confident in their ability to study in Russian. Additionally, some participants took a pragmatic approach, they explained that "a lot of people went to the Kazakh groups, and they filled up quickly, while there was less competition in the Russian groups" (Sardor). Overall, participants noted that ethnicity did not pose a significant barrier to obtaining higher education, as success in this area depended more on individual circumstances, such as socio-economic background, financial resources, secondary education training and language skills.

The participants generally consider fluency in Russian essential for success in the Kazakhstani labour market. For example, Sardor observed that "if you take an ordinary business, any business is conducted in Russian. Even documentation, everything is done in Russian, negotiations, logistics, procurement". Also, Sardor explained that "any information on the Internet, and many sites, are all in Russian or in English. In Kazakh, Kazakh needs to be developed, it has to be recognized - Kazakh is still at a basic level on the Internet". Interestingly, participants indicated that fluency in Kazakh language does not directly impact their earnings or career development. Alisher, who is fluent in Kazakh explained, "I don't think it had any influence…It [his fluency in Kazakh] is a sign of respect, that's all". Likewise, Alisher observed that "Kazakhs themselves often speak Russian. I think you need to know Russian in order to be able to be understood by others as well".

Several participants also noted that English, in their opinion, is not particularly important in the Kazakhstani system because very few people know it. It seems ethnic Uzbeks see more potential in learning the Russian language compared to English. At the same time, they highlighted that knowing Kazakh sometimes plays a significant role where bosses may only speak in Kazakh. Umida shared that not knowing Kazakh "is not difficult but uncomfortable".

A new trend among children of participants who attend Russian-medium schools could be observed. It seems these children tend to

use Russian language at home and school, while using Kazakh language when playing outside. In this situation, the usage of Uzbek seems to diminish. For instance, Sherzod explained "my parents speak Uzbek and my daughter understands them, but answers in Russian".

Redistribution

According to most of the participants, there are no significant barriers to employment for ethnic Uzbeks in the Kazakhstani labour market because, as Alisher stated "good workers are needed everywhere, bosses are another thing, but workers are needed everywhere". The participants emphasised that individual personality, rather than ethnicity, determines one's ability to pursue any profession, acknowledging that some individuals may wrongly attribute their lack of success in the labour market to their ethnicity, while also highlighting the abundance of opportunities for those who actively seek them.

While several participants reported experiencing discrimination in the workplace, it mostly came from colleagues rather than supervisors. Nigora working in a state institution recalled an incident with a colleague who stated, "why an Uzbek was hired…there are so many Kazakhs with diplomas who cannot find jobs, why not hire them"? Several participants acknowledged that there are limits to professional development for ethnic minority groups in Kazakhstan. Specifically, ethnic Uzbeks may face challenges in reaching higher managerial positions compared to their Kazakh counterparts; Nodir explained, "even if you work in a state organisation, a Kazakh will be promoted, but not an Uzbek".

Additionally, Alisher, Zuhra, Nigora and Sardor noted that "some kind of nationalism is present in Kazakhstan". Nationalism is often visible through social media platforms and sometimes at workplaces, where supporters of the Kazakh language demand that other ethnic groups use Kazakh, observed several respondents. Participants noted that usually graduates of Uzbek schools, who did not speak Kazakh or Russian much, faced more difficulties in the local labour market. At the same time, some participants expressed a lack of active pressure to become fluent in Kazakh.

One-third of participants secured their first employment through the Employment Road Map 2020 programme. The programme was established to reduce the unemployment rate among youth in the country (Employment road map programme 2020, 2011). However,

some participants reported using their social capital (family, friends and acquaintances) to secure job positions. Several respondents identified a concerning trend of bribery in the southern region, particularly in state organisations, where certain positions have fixed prices for acquiring employment, thus, ethnic Uzbeks reported preferring to seek employment in the private sector, usually with ethnic Uzbek owners.

Several participants also reported experiencing a mismatch between their education and employment. They were unable to find suitable employment with their diplomas and had to resort to low-skilled jobs. Nodir stated "after graduation, there was nowhere to work, and I was not willing to pay a bribe that was worth a year's salary; it would have been as if I worked one year for free, so I went to the construction site in Astana". This trend was particularly relevant for men who could not afford bribes or had no acquaintances in good positions to help them secure employment. Other participants who did not obtain further qualifications after secondary school cited family circumstances that pushed them to start working immediately, usually in low-skilled jobs.

Almost all participants claimed to be satisfied with their income level, and they did not feel overqualified or underpaid. This can be attributed to a realistic attitude towards earnings within the region and the country shown by the respondents. Participants' ideal salaries varied based on their age, field of work and work experience, ranging from $400 to $2,000.

Representation

The two most significant language-related policies under discussion are the trilingual reforms of secondary education and the adoption of the Latin script. The opinions of participants on both policies are divided. Some argue that a trilingual policy, whereby children learn English from the first grade, would be beneficial, as Ulduz, Ulugbek and Nigora explained "English is needed everywhere". Some also draw on their personal experiences with English and the difficulties they have encountered, lending support to the idea of early English education.

However, others are opposed to this policy; for example, Fatima stated that "it is such a pressure on my child". Given that English would be the fourth language for ethnic Uzbeks, some believe that mastering the mother tongue should be prioritised over adding any foreign language. Sherzod observed "Russian itself is difficult. Many have difficulty differentiating 'he' from 'she' in Russian".

Regarding the adoption of the Latin script in Kazakhstan, some participants oppose it, perceiving it as lacking purpose. While some suggest that learning English may be facilitated by adopting the Latin script, others argue that "Uzbekistan switched to the Latin alphabet 20 years ago, so what? Do people there speak English better now? I did not notice. It is just a waste of money" (Sardor). Participants also note the difficulties of converting textbooks from Cyrillic to Latin and teaching teachers to instruct in the new script. Moreover, a generation divide may emerge as the younger generation adapts more easily to the Latin script than those educated solely in Cyrillic. Participants recognise that such policies may create various difficulties in the education system, especially for ethnic minorities. While some believe that these policies are necessary for continuous development and keeping pace with global changes, others question their efficacy and highlight their potential drawbacks.

Most participants expressed the view that Uzbek schools should continue to exist within the Kazakhstani education system. Their rationale was that some Uzbek families should have the opportunity to educate their children in Uzbek schools. Such ethnic schools will help to preserve their language and cultural traditions. There is a fear that if all Uzbek schools were to be closed down in Kazakhstan, the Uzbek language may become extinct. However, some participants would have preferred to attend Russian schools, as it is easier to learn English there. In Uzbek schools, English is taught as the fourth language, while in Russian schools, it is the third language and the quality of education is considered to be better there. Furthermore, several participants felt that maintaining Uzbek schools in Kazakhstan was unnecessary because "children will speak Uzbek at home, they will not forget it" (Ulduz). For further education and career development, the participants suggested that Kazakh, Russian and English were the languages needed.

Participants reported seeing a clear difference between ethnic Uzbeks who attended Russian vs Uzbek schools. Sardor explained "in the Uzbek culture, we are brought up to take care of the older generation. However, ethnic Uzbeks who attended the Russian schools become more individualistic and focused on their own professional development, and they leave the elderly behind" which seems to indicate the loss of cultural values.

Reconciliation

All participants expressed a preference to stay in Kazakhstan and did not consider moving to Uzbekistan, despite some frequently visiting Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan was perceived as having more economic advantages and an overall higher standard of living. Participants also noted that their different Uzbek language dialects influenced by Kazakhstani society, would lead them to be viewed as Kazakhs in Uzbekistan. Zarina explained, "I know Kazakh well and I speak it without an accent. It is easier for me to express my thoughts in Kazakh; I don't even know some words in Uzbek, to be honest". Nargiza and Ulugbek shared a view that "we live in Kazakhstan, well, my grandfathers, great grandfathers, all lived here, it turns out, and so our Uzbek is not the same as Uzbek in Uzbekistan. Our language is a little bit like Kazakh". Likewise, Ulugbek explained, "Uzbek is my ethnicity but not my homeland. My homeland is Kazakhstan. I was born here. I may be an ethnic Uzbek but I'm not a patriot of Uzbekistan, I am a patriot of Kazakhstan". It is evident that despite close interaction of ethnic Uzbeks with Uzbekistan, and they perceive Kazakhstan as their homeland, with its higher standard of living and economic advantages, leading them to prefer staying in the country over moving to Uzbekistan.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the influence of language skills on the educational and labour market experiences of ethnic Uzbeks in Kazakhstan, as well as the opportunities and barriers they encounter as a non-titular population. The study revealed that language skills are closely linked to individual circumstances, socio-economic background and personality, rather than school choice, and play a critical role in obtaining further education and professional qualifications. The findings suggest that older generations, who completed their schooling in the mid-1990s, faced more challenges in continuing their education due to the socio-economic situation of their parents and their education level. In contrast, younger generations who graduated during the second decade of independence, when Kazakhstan experienced greater socio-economic stability, reported a closer relationship between individual choices and access to higher education.

The study also found that ethnic Uzbeks experience a certain level of discrimination, particularly in the southern regions of the country, and may encounter difficulties in advancing to higher managerial positions. However, the research demonstrates that there are no significant barriers in the Kazakhstani system that would significantly impede the well-being of ethnic Uzbeks in accessing education and professional development.

Nevertheless, it is evident that while there is a certain level of recognition and resource allocation for the Uzbek community in Kazakhstan; there is still a pressing need for greater representation in political and education-related governance. This would not only foster a more inclusive and peaceful society but also enable a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their ethnicity.

Furthermore, the study sheds light on the importance of language choice in shaping cultural and linguistic identities and creating a sense of belonging and inclusivity for individuals and communities. The mixed reactions of ethnic Uzbeks to Kazakhstan's trilingual reforms and the adoption of the Latin script emphasise the need for more research on the impact of such programmes on ethnic minorities.

To gain a better understanding of the shifting language choices of ethnic Kazakhs in Uzbekistan and how they compare to those of Uzbeks in Kazakhstan, the study recommends further comprehensive comparative research. This would provide valuable insights into the evolving linguistic landscape of the region and inform policies that promote linguistic diversity and inclusion.

The declining use of the Uzbek language among ethnic Uzbeks in Kazakhstan can also be understood in the context of language shift, a form of cultural assimilation where a community stop using their traditional language in favour of a dominant or majority language. This trend aligns with Churchill's typology, which identifies the assimilation stage as a period when a minority group begins to adopt the language and cultural practices of the dominant group (Churchill, 1996). The government's language policies, which prioritise the use of Kazakh and Russian, also contribute to this assimilation trend. Thus, policymakers need to consider the impact of language and education policies in Kazakhstan on the diverse communities they serve and promote inclusivity and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity.

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Equity in Assessment in Tajikistan: Language Minority Students and Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

Vasila Bozichaeva

Background and Introduction

The education systems of the three Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan that were chosen as focus area of this book have been going through various reforms over the last thirty years in an attempt to maintain the positive education achievements these countries had enjoyed before the collapse of the Soviet Union (Silova, 2002). Additionally, adjustment was needed to shift from the centrally funded and controlled education economy to align with market economy goals, political agendas, globalization, and demands of state-building (Jonboboev, 2010). However, the transformation process for Tajikistan was slow compared to other post-soviet countries, as the brutal Civil War from 1992 to 1997 resulted in a high brain drain of qualified education

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personnel and the destruction of infrastructure, and severe psycho-social consequences impacted the provision of education in the country.

However, all the central Asian countries except Turkmenistan started the Education for All (EFA) country assessments as part of the post-soviet transformation agenda and set forwards strategic goals in education that would improve enrollment rates for primary, secondary, and higher education and ensure access to quality education in the later years (Silova, 2002). The countries have prioritized education reforms to ensure equitable access to education with the joint attention and support of international donors and local education authorities to initiate inclusive education. Inclusive education is believed to contribute to overall social justice and harmonization in society; thus, the enrollment and quality education provision for students from diverse backgrounds such as gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status (Makoelle & Somerton, 2020) is the main rationale of inclusive education in Central Asia. Inclusion is part of the broader concept of "equity." Research shows that, in general, socially vulnerable groups are deprived of decent support in education and face social isolation, alienation, and marginalization (Nadirova, 2023). Currently, the legislation of Kazakhstan identifies the need for quality education provision for students with special education needs (Kazakhstan, 2007), defining them in Article 19–2 as "those who experience constant or temporary difficulties in education due to health reasons." Other policy documents include the 2015 Conceptual Approaches to the Development of Inclusive Education, the 2002 Law on the Rights of Child, and the 2002 Law on social and medical-pedagogical correctional support for disabled children in Kazakhstan. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan also ratified analogous international human rights conventions and amended the laws on education to support inclusion in access and quality. Gender and ethnic-linguistic diversity are considered central to inclusion in education and thus need legislative and policy acknowledgment. Recognizing this and the extremely distinct nature of Central Asia in terms of languages and ethnicity (Bahry, 2005), Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan give the right to obtain education in the native languages, while making the state language as a priority. However, this picture changed in the later years with the pursuit of state-building goals. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan adhered to the revitalization of the titular languages, thus they give preference to education in Uzbek and Tajik languages, respectively (Bahry et al., 2017). As of 2022, 5040 school groups are taught in Uzbek, 559 in Kyrgyz, and

55 in Turkmen languages in Tajikistan[1] (EMIS Tajikistan, 2022). These groups are mainly established in the areas where the respective minority populations are concentrated. Despite the inclusive approach to equitable education, educational funding and policy implementation are focused on developing textbooks and curricular, teaching and learning materials in the state languages only (Bahry, 2005). As for students with disabilities, their proportion in higher education in Tajikistan makes 0.0008%, that is, 2041 students with disabilities currently study in higher education in Tajikistan. However, the number of pupils with disabilities in schools is nearly three times more (7132) than the students with disabilities in higher education in Tajikistan (EMIS Tajikistan, 2022). Furthermore, language minority students and students with disabilities face unequal opportunities during admission to higher education through the unified testing systems that all three countries use. Ethno-linguistic minority students demonstrate "low performance rate in standardized examinations" (Kazimzade, 2011, p. 9). Since admission examinations are run only in the state languages, ethnic minorities are disadvantaged in Central Asia (Watkins, 2007). The current national education development strategies for the period until 2030 and the three countries' mandates of SDG 4 of the United Nations Organization prioritize the accessibility of infrastructure, teacher capacity building regarding equitable education, textbooks, and curricula reconsideration for minority and disability students in higher education (National Strategy for Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan for the Period until 2030, 2020). Therefore, questions arise as to whether students belonging to linguistic minorities are as successful as their counterparts both at university and later in the job market. The level of academic success, competencies, and knowledge of students is determined by assessment which also plays an indisputably crucial role in their path to graduation. In Western countries, students' assessment experiences have been reported to be drastically different if they are from non-traditional backgrounds (Tai et al., 2021). This chapter aims to analyze how language minority and students with disabilities experience the assessment policy in higher education in Tajikistan. It opens the discussion about the need for equitable assessment and its implications for social justice and inclusive society in the region.

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[1] Tajik is a Persian language, Russian is Slavic, while Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Uzbek are Turkic and use different alphabets. Therefore, they greatly differ from each other and are not mutually intelligible.

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Education research focusing on equity and inclusion in Central Asia is largely silent on assessment but instead focuses on general policy analysis (Maulsharif et al., 2022; United Nations, 2000), teachers and pedagogy (Makoelle & Somerton, 2020; Moshenskaya, 2012), parental perceptions of inclusive education (Khamidulina, 2018), language inequality (Bahry et al., 2017; Niyozov & Shamatov, 2010). Furthermore, research is concentrated on primary and secondary education compared to higher education. Assessment is an important component of higher education which is conducted to (a) compare students with each other, (b) ascertain if students meet a particular standard, (c) help improve student's learning, and (d) check if the teaching program is doing its job (Baxter & Seligson, 1997). An equitable-minded approach requires equity in all four assessment objectives. The assessment process that does not include equity can contrarily promote inequities (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017). The overlapping nature of the terms "equity" and "inclusion" in assessment has led to the use of various terminology such as *inclusive assessment* (Hockings, 2010), *assessment for social justice* (McArthur, 2016), *culturally-responsive assessment* (Ford & Kea, 2017), and *equity-minded assessment* (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020). Nevertheless, all these terms refer to an assessment that recognizes diversity in student learning. In the center of such an assessment approach is always the student whose diversity and uniqueness are recognized, valued, supported, and further improved. Equity-minded assessment calls for main education stakeholders, those involved in policy development and policy implementation, to be aware of assessment either becoming a source of inequity or the route through which equity can be achieved. The issues faced by students with disabilities or linguistic minority students during assessment were resolved through inclusive assessment accommodations and designs such as additional time allocation during the examination, technological support, and separate rooms. However, Nieminen (2022) argues that the traditional ways of "inclusive assessment" focusing on individual needs lead to systematic discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, and their intersectionality. These students are seen as a problem in the institution and the policy acknowledges their limitations during assessment and provides them with targeted solutions which is not considered as equitable approach. Therefore, the debate is needed to be raised toward highlighting the true problem of assessment as opposed to only

accommodating tools for ensuring inclusion and equity. Systematic top-down changes in assessment are required, especially in the contexts where the policy does not embed an equitable assessment approach in grading, tests, and written examinations (Nieminen, 2022). To avoid the perpetuation of inequitable assessment experiences, the overprioritized traditional assessment approach should be complemented with opportunities to incorporate the voices of students and lecturers at the policy development stage and faculty (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017; Nieminen, 2022).

While serving a strong conceptual basis for the study of the perception of lecturers and students about assessment in universities in Tajikistan, Montenegro and Jankowski's (2020) and Nieminen's (2022) concepts of equity in assessment need to be complemented by a political-economy lens to better understand the overall picture of the issue in the region. Therefore, I combine the concept of "equity-minded assessment" with the social justice theory of Nancy Fraser (1995) to examine the experiences of students and lecturers of the assessment policy. I draw on Novelli et al. (2019), who combined Nancy Fraser's 3Rs, Redistribution, Recognition, and Representation, with the fourth "R" of Reconciliation to study social justice and equity issues in education systems in contexts of violence and fragility.

The study examined the views of students and lecturers based on the 4Rs by checking whether students have equitable access to the assessment tools, resources (technology, stationery, space), and their equal distribution to all students. It checks if the tools of assessment ensure equitable outcomes/results for all students. With Recognition in mind, the study explored whether the language of assessment is inclusive and understandable and if disability is considered in the assessment tools and methods. Equally, the biases and subjectivity of those conducting the assessment (Prince & Levy, 2017) were studied. Recognition was examined through how the context of the institution, the person(s) conducting the assessment, and the learners being assessed are understood and reflected in the assessment tools (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017). Representation helped to identify if students' and lecturers' voices and perspectives are heard and considered before designing an assessment policy and implementing it. Representation is ensured through whether the learning outcomes are developed based on the vision and understanding of lecturers and students, and if the voices of those historically silenced (ethnic, gender, language, disability) groups are listened

to and heard (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017). Moreover, decision-making and university governance processes regarding learning outcomes and assessment involve multiple stakeholders and their voices which were also testified. Finally, reconciliation directed the research focus on examining lecturers' and students' opinions regarding reconciling the historical experience of having been colonized and how it is reflected in the assessment policy. More specifically, language reconciliation through assessment practices and the extent to which the students and lecturers trust the assessment policy were examined. It was crucial to understand the content of the summative assessment tests and their compliance with the needs and understanding of the students.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods research design (Tashakkori et al., 2021) was employed to expand the breadth and range (Greene et al., 1989) of the perspectives of students and lecturers regarding equity-minded assessment. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were undertaken to understand lecturers' views on the assessment policy in higher education in Tajikistan. Students' perspectives were collected via a questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three sections and included sections on the 4Rs analytical framework. Both structured and open questions based on the 4Rs were included to ensure alignment through the two types of data sets.

Ethical approval of the study was granted by Ulster University. The participants were first introduced to the aims and objectives of the study with the participant information sheet and were given a choice to withdraw from the interviews and questionnaires if they wished so. All participants gave oral consent. Confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants were ensured by using codes and numbers instead of their actual names.

SAMPLING

Lecturers and students were recruited from three higher education institutions, two in the capital city, Dushanbe and one university in Khujand city, in roughly equal numbers across the three universities. Purposive sampling was used for interviewing lecturers, and quota sampling was used for selecting students.

In total, ten lecturers were interviewed. Two interviews were conducted online and eight in person. Criteria for choosing lecturers included their years of professional experience in education. All questionnaires were administered in person, and a total of 215 questionnaires were completed. The sample size was defined based on the minimum sample number for statistical significance to make a meaningful analysis. Students of second and third year in bachelor programs were selected since they had already experienced the assessment policy.

Data Analysis

As Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight, the credibility and validity of thematic analysis as a flexible and useful research tool being able to make any theoretical and conceptual assumptions for a study transparent, the author decided to analyze the opinions of lecturers shared in the semi-structured interviews toward themes and codes as required in thematic analysis. The ten interviews with lecturers were conducted in a language they felt confident in (i.e., either Tajik or Russian) and were fully transcribed. After adding the data to NVivo software, the analysis involved immersion in the data and its repeated reading in the search of meanings, patterns, and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As for the students' responses to the survey questionnaire, frequency distribution was conducted using SPSS.

Findings

Demographic and Background Information

All the lecturers came from social sciences disciplines except one Math lecturer. There were two Psychology lecturers, two Philosophy, two Foreign languages, one Political Science, and one Pedagogy lecturers who specialized in inclusive education and teaching students with special needs. Seven lecturers had been teaching at higher education level for 10–13 years, while three lecturers had from 20–25 years of teaching experience. Regarding the demographics of the responding students, 46% were men and 54% women. Around 49.3% students were in the third year and 50.7% were in the fourth year of the academic curriculum. The students came from a range of disciplines within these ten faculties (Table 10.1).

Table 10.1 Students' disciplines

Faculty/schools	Percent of students	Faculty/schools	Percent of students
Foreign Languages	24.1	Philology	8.8
Philosophy	18.1	Journalism	6.0
Psychology	13.5	Mathematics	5.6
Economics and Management	11.2	History	1.5
Physics	9.8	Biology	1.4

Regarding the medium of instruction at school, most students went to a Tajik-medium school. Although about 5% and 7% students in the sample ($n = 215$) studied at school in Kyrgyz and Uzbek languages, respectively, their university program is taught in either Russian or Tajik. It was important to see the difference between the language taught during the graduate program and the one students know the best. Tajik language is well understood by the majority (70.2%) of students. Surprisingly, 11.2% of students claimed being fluent in Uzbek which is more than the proportion of those who have Uzbek as a medium of instruction at school (6.5%). This signifies that Uzbek-speaking minorities do not choose Uzbek medium school even if they are fully competent in it. It might be because of the lack of university programs in Uzbek language. On the other hand, universities now offer graduate programs in English language and 2.3% of the students studied in English medium programs, although none of them claimed having a good knowledge of that language (Table 10.2).

Table 10.2 Language of instruction at school, university, and language the students know better

Students	Language of instruction at school	Language of instruction at university	Language they know best
Tajik	83.3	74.9	70.2
Russian	5.1	22.8	14.0
Uzbek	6.5	0.0	11.2
Kyrgyz	4.7	0.0	4.2
Kazakh	0.0	0.0	0.5
English	0.5	2.3	0.0

As for disability, the number of respondents with physical disabilities was equal to 11.6% and 0.5% had mental disability.

Assessment Tools and Methods

As for assessment practices that define the learning outcomes of students, the study aimed at identifying and checking the main tools of assessment used at higher education institutions in Tajikistan. The types of assessment tools are divided into summative examination and formative assessment practices in the questionnaire. For summative assessment, the so-called rating is used twice a semester to add up 50% to the final ESTC credits obtained during final examination. Starting from 2022, higher education institutions were given autonomy to reintegrate the traditional oral examination method for the first time since the ECTS were introduced in Tajikistan in 2008. In this section of the questionnaire, students were asked to rate the frequency of currently used and preferred summative and formative assessment tools on a three-point scales *never* and *rarely, sometimes and* often *and always*. The analysis illustrated that the most frequent forms of formative assessment that are used by lecturers were written papers in the form of a 10-page report *referat*[2] and independent work, active class participation, checking notebooks for word-to-word notes of lectures *konspekt*,[3] and individual presentation (Fig. 10.1).

Although largely practiced, students rated writing assignments in the form of *referat* as a less preferred form of assessment. Group presentations are not widely used to assess students learning, but students expressed a high preference for this type of assessment (Table 10.3).

The differences between the rest of the assessment strategies currently being used and those which the students prefer are not wide. Regarding summative assessment, students prefer oral exams as opposed to computer-based tests. Rather surprisingly and carrying grave implications for equity, summative assessment involves assessing the appearance of students. The students rated it the most frequently used assessment tool, although the students' clothing does not reflect the learning outcomes in any programs. It is a widely used practice in Tajikistan to strictly

[2] Referat is a short report or presentation on a particular topic, which gathers information from one or more sources.

[3] Konspekt is an outline, a summary of the content of something, for example, summary of a lecture.
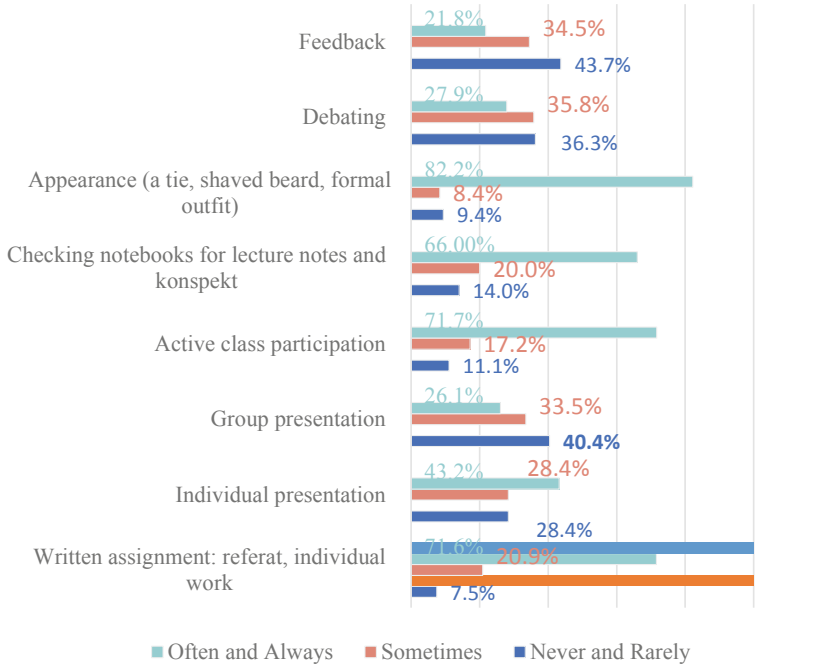
Fig. 10.1 Percentage distribution of forms of assessment that are currently used at the graduate program

control students' appearance with specific clothing guidance and requirements. Over the last 15 years, ministries and rectors of certain universities ordered decrees on banning jeans, sneakers, any casual clothing, hijab, wearing a beard for students, and heels (not higher than 15 cm), which later was embedded into assessment policy. The aim is, on the one side, to fight against alienation (Arabization and Westernization) and, on the other side, to forcefully maintain secular societal practices through education (Thibault, 2016). Such a practice undeniably brings negative implications for equity in assessment for students with disabilities, students from poorer backgrounds and female students. Formal clothes are not comfortable for students who have physical disabilities. Students from poorer backgrounds cannot afford the clothing. Thus, they have to prioritize buying uniforms for books and other educational needs. Female

Table 10.3 Forms of assessment currently in use compared to what students would prefer

Form of exam	In use in HEIs (always & often) percentage	Preferred by students (always & often) percentage
Summative assessment forms		
Oral exams	43.3	57.2
Rating tests	41.8	46.6
Computer-based exams	50.7	48.8
Continuous assessment forms (formative)		
Written assignment: referat, individual work	71.6	49.8
Individual presentation	43.2	54.5
Group presentation	26.1	43.2
Active class participation	71.7	73.5
Appearance (a tie, shaved beard, formal outfit)	82.2	57.2
Checking notebooks for lecture notes and konspekt	66	49.7
Feedback	21.8	37.2

students particularly suffer from the ban on hijab, which brings both equity issues and equality in access to higher education.

Students' Understanding of Equity in Assessment

To prepare students to respond accurately to questions involving their perceptions of the extent to which different forms of assessment include equity, students' understanding of equitable assessment was first checked by an open-ended question. The students' responses demonstrate that students, in general, well understand equitable assessment (Fig. 10.2). They reflected on the assessment type that is fair and transparent and considers the exclusive capabilities and skills of a student regardless of gender, economic well-being, nationality, physical appearance, and level of disability.

The responses to the open-ended questions included various interesting points of view on the definition and the experiences of students with the assessment policy.

One of the responses well articulates tolerance toward diversity in students:
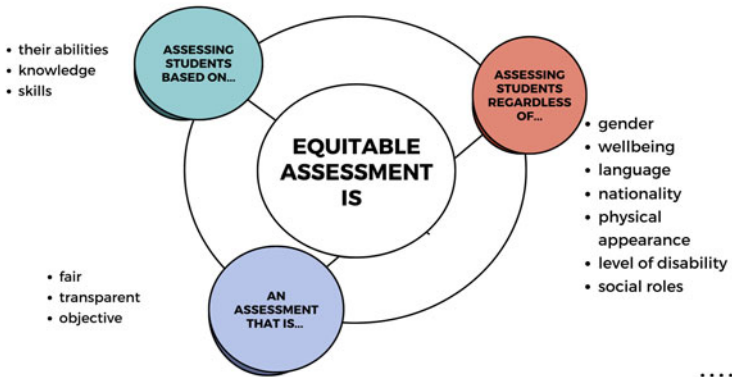
Fig. 10.2 Students' understanding of equitable assessment

> Equity-minded assessment is to create opportunities for students' personal growth and giving real mark to students learning outcomes regardless of gender, language, nationality, level of disability and socio-economic condition of the students. (Student 111)

Another student raises the issue of nepotism and kinship and their implication for providing equitable assessment and equity in education in general.

> For example, we have such cases when a lecturer and a student both come from one region and one ethnicity, and the lecturer puts better marks for him/her in comparison with me studying better and always participating actively in classes. Equitable assessment is to assess students' knowledge without paying attention to their gender, ethnicity, nation, and other indicators. (Student 108)

Students mentioned that oral examination is more equitable (60%) in comparison with tests performed on a computer (51.2%) (Fig. 10.3). Tests on computer appear to be a very challenging type of assessment based on the survey results. Many students mentioned that when passing tests, the computers do not work properly (9.5%), there are a lot of

spelling mistakes in the tests (7.3%), test answers in computer do not match with the test questions (5.7%), the test questions are difficult to understand (7.6%), the internet is very slow for test taking (3.8%), and students from minority languages do not understand the test (3.4%).

When questioned about the issues that students with disability encounter during examinations, the answers given by 215 students differed. Some of the responses were that visually impaired student cannot view test content on a computer (5.6%), they are unable to see the board in class (2.8%), they may have difficulty accessing upper floors for classes and exams (6.6%), and there are no ramps on the university premises for students in wheelchairs (5.6%). These examples illustrate how insufficient infrastructure can restrict students' access to fair assessment resources. Particularly, students with disabilities do not have access to assessment tools, especially computerized examinations, and especially blind students cannot independently pass tests without the support of others.
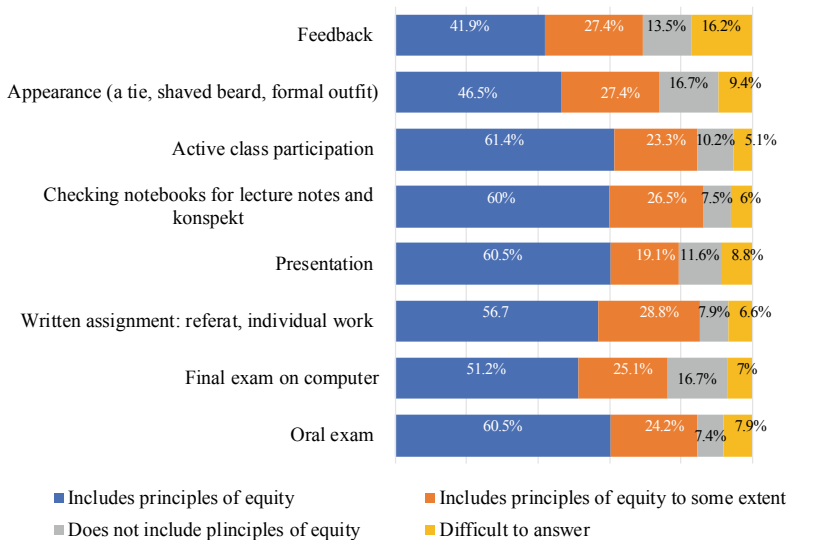
Fig. 10.3 Percentage distribution of students' understanding of forms of assessment that are most equitable

Lecturers' Experiences of Assessment

The above issues were reflected in the semi-structured interviews with the lecturers. The interview questions were structured around three themes (a) experiences of lecturers in assessing learning outcomes of diverse students, (b) assessment forms and tools that are used to assess minority languages and disabilities students, (c) platforms that give students and lecturers opportunities to raise their voices toward assessment policy and practice. Three themes emerged from the analysis of lecturers' transcripts: lecturers' readiness for inclusive education, equity in assessment through *lecturer-driven* inclusive assessment accommodation, and emerging platforms for lecturers and students.

Lecturers' Preparedness for Inclusive Education

It appears lecturers were not ready for inclusive assessment since the majority expressed surprise and uncertainty toward the fact that students with disabilities are enrolled in higher education institutions in Tajikistan. Half of the lecturers referred to the lack of conditions for students with disabilities at their university.

> I have never noticed that blind students had any special conditions. I think that they are assessed through oral examination only because they are not familiar with using the assessment technology. During the examination, lecturers give them marks without the student actually sitting the test. These students should be at boarding schools. (Lecturer 3)

This demonstrates that lecturers had little to no capacity to work with students with disabilities. Some lecturers also mentioned that they should have seminars and pilot classes on how to work with students with disabilities. Of the ten lecturers interviewed, only one was fully equipped with the knowledge and competency to teach and assess students with disabilities.

> Students with special needs are supported in all aspects during the examination and thus, their marks do not reflect the real knowledge they have. This is not correct since these students will be considered fully graduated students of their chosen profession. I apply the main principles of inclusive education in my assessment approach, which are access, participation and support. (Lecturer 9)

Lecturers report that students who do not understand Tajik or Russian have increased over the last three years. There are reports that students from remote regions have limited knowledge of the language used for instruction. This could be due to the poor quality of education they received in primary and secondary schools, which is attributed to a significant shortage of qualified teaching staff.

Equity through Lecturer-Driven Inclusive Assessment Accommodation
The assessment policy of the sampled institutions does not provide inclusive assessment accommodation. This issue is repeatedly reported by lecturers who take the initiative to provide support for students who struggle because of either disability or lack of language competency. Issues related to providing translation and recruiting additional lecturers competent in the minority language were not particularly striking in the interviews. However, two interviewees mentioned that they hire Uzbek language lecturers. Lecturers implement various measures to address the challenges faced by minority language students. These measures include assigning extra lecturers during exams, having fellow students provide oral translations of tests, grouping students from the same minority language together, and having a lecturer who understands their language lead bilingual classes, and designating a fellow student to assist disabled or minority students during exams. This process requires additional time and effort from lecturers, and it does not bring equity in assessment. For example, Lecturer 1 mentioned:

> We finally have to put these students passing marks only if they at least attend the classes, and do homework on his/her notebooks and respond to any exam questions. We put 52-53 scores for them. It does not mean that the students acquired the learning outcomes required by the curriculum. We just pass them from one level to another with minimal scores.

Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation of Assessment Policy

The majority of students mentioned that they have equal access to all tools and resources of assessment (technology, stationery, space, other infrastructure). Kyrgyz- and Uzbek-speaking students also mentioned that they have equal access to assessment resources. One-fourth of the respondents

claimed to have equal access to assessment resources of their institution which is also true for students with disabilities ($n = 22$) (Fig. 10.4).

In the open-ended questions, students shared a range of challenges they experienced or observed students with disabilities experienced, including difficulties in reaching the needed floor ($n = 19$), lack of ramps ($n = 16$), inappropriate classroom setup ($n = 14$), taking a test on computers ($n = 16$), absence of specific literature for blind students ($n = 8$), and lack of ability to work with electronic board ($n = 8$) and exams that ended too late ($n = 9$).

Surprisingly, lecturers' opinions differed. A recurrent theme in the interviews was the assessment accommodation for students with disabilities. Universities' senior management and lecturers decide to put students with disabilities on the first floor even if their faculty is located upstairs because the university is not equipped with an elevator. In some cases, the whole class is moved to the first floor because of one student with a physical disability in the group.

Most participants seem proficient in the language used for assessing their academic program, but there are concerns about Kyrgyz- and
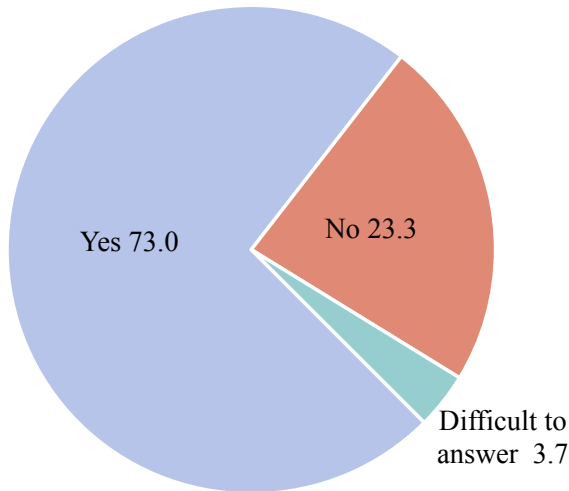
Fig. 10.4 Access to assessment tools and infrastructure for students with disabilities

Table 10.4 Students' opinions on the language of assessment

Is the language of assessment clear to you and is it clear to students whose mother tongue is different from the language of instruction?

	Yes	*To some extent*	*No*	*Difficult to answer*
Overall number of students	129	60	21	5
Students with disabilities	16	7	3	0
Uzbek-speaking students	23	13	5	0
Kyrgyz-speaking students	4	2	3	0

Uzbek-speaking students (Table 10.4). Specifically, more Kyrgyz-speaking students seem to lack proficiency in the language of assessment, which could result in unequal learning outcomes if their program does not address their language needs.

Concerns regarding the recognition of student diversity were widespread in the three themes that emerged from lecturers' interviews. However, whether equity is brought to the policy implementation and whether the vulnerable students feel their full recognition is questionable. The theme "fellow support," for example, came up in discussions in eight out of ten interviews referring to both students with disability and those from minority languages as a redistribution approach. Although the policy does not institutionalize the volunteering of fellow students, they are systematically appointed to be responsible for their vulnerable fellow students with no recognition of their service.

> There is a student in each group who becomes a close friend to the vulnerable student and helps him/her during the examination. (Lecturer 5)

When asked about the attitude and biases of lecturers toward minority groups and students with disabilities, more than half of students indicated the biased attitude of lecturers. Students with disabilities and Uzbek-speaking students were more positive toward their lecturers than the small number of Kyrgyz-speaking students (Fig. 10.5).

The lecturers did not echo this view. On the contrary, lecturers mentioned their support in the form of additional time, constant translation in the language of instruction, using alternative assessment tools,
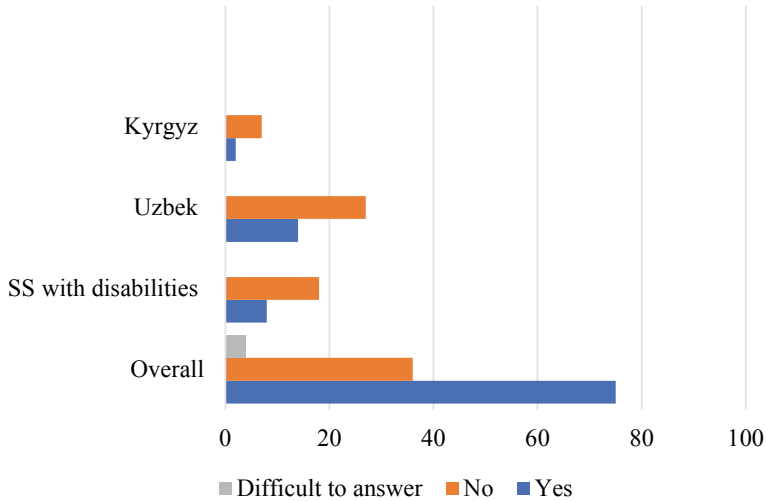
Fig. 10.5 Percentage distribution of biases and subjectivity of lecturers during assessment

arranging additional preparation lessons, or just adding up to their final score for the student's effort and active participation during lessons.

Regarding students' representation in developing assessment policies at their universities, the majority of those who responded to this question stated that their opinions and thoughts are not considered while designing the assessment strategies.

The issues faced by students who have complaints and wish to contribute to changing the assessment strategies emerged in interviews with lecturers who shared their experience in raising their voices in this regard and the platforms through which students can reach out to senior university management. The theme of bottom-up representation emerged. Lecturers indicated that the universities use established platforms of Youth Unions, Students Union Council, and Students Scientific Society for consulting students in decision-making regarding assessment. Lecturers reported these platforms to have annual plans and presidential election. They mentioned "that through these platforms or individually, students approach the class supervisor" (each class is assigned a curator in the first years of their BA degree program and he/she is responsible

for the group until they complete university who reaches out to the faculty dean, and they go to the university deputy head for curriculum and further in accordance with the hierarchy.

> We discuss the quality and progress of students' knowledge and their assessment/marks. The council discusses all the issues with lecturers, and only the rectorate makes decisions on making changes in the system. In general, when concerns occur, the curator listens to the students and discusses the issue with the Head of the Department and the matter goes upward. (Lecturer 7)

The final section of the questionnaire covered reconciliation elements in higher education assessment. Lecturers or students did not specifically raise issues related to language reconciliation, the history of colonization and how it is reflected in the assessment policy. Only a few lecturers could reflect upon this issue and they highly felt nostalgic toward the Soviet assessment system that assured quality of education. One concern expressed regarding lesson-learning from history and decolonizing the assessment tools was constructed this way:

> Religious people believe that it was better in the past, but we cannot go back to the 6th century. We are currently copying the Western system to replace the Soviet system, and we are left with nothing now. At the moment, we will progress the way it is dictated from above, I mean from Russia. In order to make growth happen, it's important to open an institution which will be responsible for designing education policy with a group of well-educated specialists and with good salaries. (Lecturer 10)

As a reconciling mechanism, students' trust in the assessment policy is very important; thus, the questionnaire asked about this issue (Fig. 10.6). Students' level of trust toward the assessment policy is generally positive. They believe that their learning outcomes are being assessed objectively and fairly.

For example, one out of ten of participants indicated that lecturers support students with disabilities by giving additional scores (4.7%), freeing them from submitting written assignments (1.3%), and allocating additional time during lessons (3.4%). However, lecturers acknowledged that most students with disabilities are against how the lecturers accommodate them. The students demand to be assessed as "normal" students.
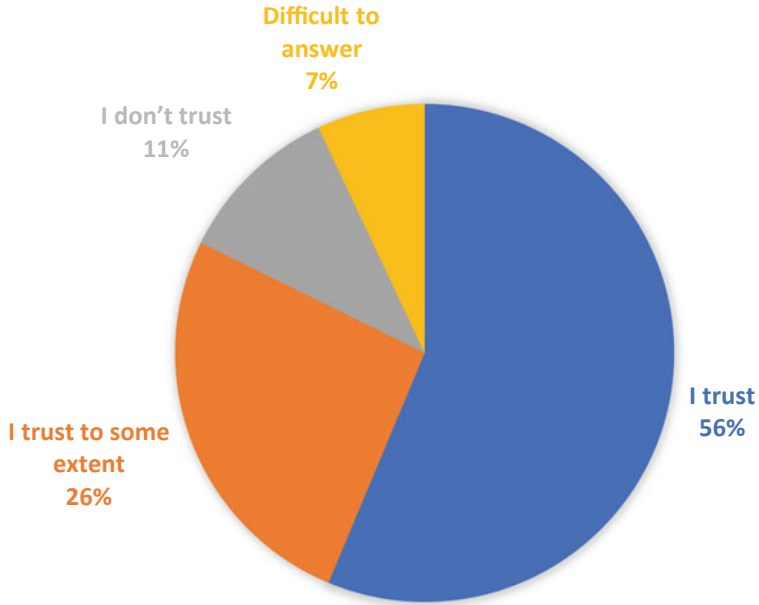
Fig. 10.6 Percentage distribution of students' trust in the assessment policy

> Students with disabilities complain that our help is counterproductive for them. Our help results in getting marks that they do not deserve and that do not reflect their knowledge. (Lecturer 2)

These practices hinder students from active participation in the learning environment and do not meet the requirement of inclusive education and equity in assessment.

CONCLUSIONS

What emerges from the results reported here is that the participating students and lecturers understand the meaning of equity in assessment differently. Most students consider equity as giving equal opportunities for students regardless of their differences and limitations. They appreciate the support that their lecturers provide to them, but they do not even

think about the more important implications of equitable assessment, such as providing flexible and needs-based policy and implementation opportunities that will enable them to thrive irrespective of their limitations. The results also indicate that not all students have equal access to assessment tools and strategies, and some of them are not aware of how to use computers, although part of summative examination is fully computerized. Moreover, the fact that assessment content is entirely in a language that is not understandable by some students makes the learning process inequitable for them. However, although the traditional inclusive education accommodations are not stated in the assessment policy at higher education, lecturers and, at some points, university management accommodate them based on the number of linguistic minority students and those with disabilities. Lecturers felt morally obliged to use inclusion in assessment practices, and should the universities develop a policy to make the assessment process equitable, lecturers would greatly contribute to its implementation.

Lecturers' views suggest that the perspective of "policy-driven accommodations" for equitable assessment and a "lecturer -initiated approach" will ensure the recognition and representation of minority students and those with disability. Platforms already exist to hear the voices of students and lecturers regarding assessment and other higher education policies. However, since inclusive education is new to post-Soviet Tajikistan, the positive perspectives shared by students and lecturers indicate a crucial need to initiate equity-based assessment at higher education institutions.

Providing equitable education for vulnerable students is as important as the right to education and assessment is crucial in establishing and developing an equitable policy. It requires capacity building of lecturers in the area of inclusive education and their day-to-day collaboration with other university stakeholders. The current inclusive policies vastly deny the adaptation of assessment tools and methods to support students with disabilities, language minority students, and students from underprivileged backgrounds. The foremost step is to start sharing the vision of equitable inclusive assessment within the education sector at all levels and then collectively develop assessment methods and tools according to student diversity.

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Political Economy Analysis of Factors Influencing the Expansion of Russian International Branch Campuses in Uzbekistan

Sherzod Khaydarov

Introduction

The International Branch Campus (IBC) is one of Uzbekistan's fastest expanding higher education (HE) sectors. Uzbekistan has more IBCs than any other post-Soviet country, which makes it fertile ground for researching the internationalization of HE. The first two IBCs, the Westminster International University in Tashkent and Plekhanov Russian Economics University, were founded in 2002. However, by 2017 only seven IBCs from five countries (UK, Italy, S. Korea, Singapore, and Russia) operated in the country. Within the last five years, IBCs increased more than fourfold. Russian universities account for the largest share of

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this surge. Until 2016, there were only three Russian IBCs, reaching 14 by 2022. By contrast, western countries such as the USA, the UK, and Italy have only one IBC each, raising further questions as to why Uzbekistan particularly relies on Russian universities to internationalize its HE system.

There are different interpretations of IBCs across the world, and there is no commonly accepted definition of the term (Becker, 2010). The most comprehensive and widely used definition, however, comes from the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) and Cross-Border Education Research Team (C-BERT): 'an entity that is owned, at least in part, by a foreign education provider; operated in the name of the foreign education provider; and provides an entire academic program, substantially on-site, leading to a degree awarded by the foreign education provider' (Garrett et al., 2016, p. 8), which fits with the description of Russian IBC, as stated in the agreement between Uzbekistan and Russia on establishing branch campuses.

The HE relations between the former Soviet countries and the operation of Russian IBCs are under-investigated areas. The scarcity of information about the benefits for the countries integrating IBCs necessitates investigating the case in the context of host countries (Knight & McNamara, 2015), including Uzbekistan. Thus, this study aims to identify the contributions of Russian IBCs to the development of HE and understand the long-term potential implications for the country's educational, socio-economic, and political development. The research brings a critical political economy perspective in a field framed within a knowledge economy paradigm, and highlights the under-researched perspective of the Central Asia (CA) region with a focus on Russian IBCs.

CA countries and Russia have different social, economic, and political contexts, but their relationships are shaped by their political and economic interests as well as Soviet legacies and nation building aspirations (Chankseliani, 2020). Nevertheless, Russia still plays a significant role in the region in terms of political, economic, and cultural partnerships, and trade. Likewise, Central Asian education systems are also partly bound to Russia's. In educational cooperation with CA countries, Russia has one significant advantage over other countries, namely the Russian language. Accordingly, other CA countries also host several Russian IBCs: Kazakhstan has four, Tajikistan has three and Kyrgyzstan accommodates

two.[1] Thus, this study is important for other CA states, as they can learn from the Uzbek experience.

The main concern with current policy is that there is a lack of understanding of how IBCs may contribute to the development of local HE. In this research, I argue that Russian IBCs serve Russia's political and economic interests rather than contributing to Uzbekistan's academic interests and the internationalization of HE. By examining the wider literature on IBCs and the policy agendas of both countries, for the first time, this research will assess the implications of importing Russian HE from a political economy perspective. In view of these, the research will examine the following two questions:

(1) What are the policy agendas of Uzbekistan in inviting Russian universities to establish branch campuses and what are the policy agendas of the home country (Russia)?
(2) How do the administrative and academic staff of Russian IBCs perceive the contributions of these branches to the development of HE in Uzbekistan?

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Policymaking in education is a complex process which involves multiple agencies, discourses, and motivations. To grasp the complexity of education policymaking, it is necessary to identify ideologies and influences in more detail (Ball, 2012). A growing body of research shows that education policies and interventions are not just influenced by design, but also by numerous contextual factors (Novelli et al., 2017). A thorough understanding of such subtleties requires a multiscale approach that takes local, national, and global dynamics into account in national policies and practices (Fritz et al., 2009; Novelli et al., 2017). With this in mind, I employ a political economy analysis (PEA) which explores political, cultural, social, and economic influences shaping education systems, policymaking, and educational interventions (Novelli et al., 2014). A key principle of the PEA is that educational systems and outcomes are not inseparable from political and economic systems and power relations.

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[1] Turkmenistan had the branch of Gubkin Russian State University of Oil and Gas which was closed in 2012.

Considering the complexity and diversity of IBCs, and the political, cultural, and historical context of HE import–export relations, I employed Qiang's (2003) and Knight's (2012) typology of internationalization rationales as a conceptual framework to deconstruct the policy agendas of both countries, define what factors have been prioritized or overlooked, and assess their potential implications for the development of HE. The framework helped to identify and categorize the rationales according to political, economic, academic, and socio-cultural aspects, and understand the relation of these factors to the expansion of Russian IBCs.

The literature reveals various rationales for establishing IBCs from the perspective of home countries, with a focus on financial, reputational, and academic factors (Girdzijauskaite & Radzeviciene, 2014). Some authors highlight the political, socio-cultural, and economic aspects of internationalizing HE, including national and institutional motivations (de Wit, 2002; Knight, 2012). Universities in western countries are primarily interested in generating profits by establishing their satellites abroad (Becker, 2010), while others seek to develop their international reputation in an increasingly competitive education market (Knight, 2012; Verbik, 2007). At the same time, national governments, including Russia (Abbasov, 2022; Chankseliani, 2020) and China (He & Wilkins, 2019), are more attracted to the idea of establishing and preserving political links and soft power in the regions of their interest through IBCs.

By contrast, for host countries, as stated by Knight and McNamara (2015), IBCs provide the opportunity of expanding access to HE and diversifying educational options. The authors also highlighted the growing role of IBCs in increasing the research output and developing the domestic knowledge economy. Others specified that countries import HE to enhance capacity building, develop curriculum and pedagogy (Knight & Liu, 2019), modernize the economy, establish education hubs, develop research (Wilkins, 2016), reverse the brain drain, generate income, and transfer technology (Shams & Huisman, 2012).

There are some critiques of IBCs as well. For instance, Altbach and de Wit (2020) expressed their doubt about the use of IBCs in developing HE system, arguing that IBCs operate in their own settings and are restricted by the educational agenda of home universities. Other authors have criticized the quality of programmes IBCs offer and raised their concerns on political and ideological issues (Becker, 2010; Wilkins, 2016). The rapid development of IBCs has also been criticized for generating an

imbalance of power between sending and receiving countries (Altbach, 2010; He & Wilkins, 2019).

The role of Russian universities in developing cross-border education is often ignored despite Russia being one of the main providers of IBCs in the world. Research on Russian IBCs is under-represented in the global literature, with only two studies addressing the topic directly. Chankseliani's (2020) exploratory study, for instance, focuses on the politics of exporting Russian IBCs in post-Soviet spaces employing neo-imperialism and internationalization concepts. Although the study lacks empirical evidence, she states that neo-imperial ambitions with a view to dominate political and cultural domains have driven Russian educational expansion in the former Soviet republics rather than economic factors. Abbasov (2022), on the other hand, studied six branches of Lomonosov Moscow State University (LMSU) through HE regionalism and demonstrated divergent aspects of Russian IBCs from western models in terms of five thematic categories: governance, access, standards, faculty, and larger community. The key difference, he argues, is the prevalence of private HE in the Western model versus public HE in the Russian model. This confirms Chankseliani's study that the 'publicness' of Russian HE has been the main indicator of Russia's political aspirations and soft power. Although these two studies present intriguing insights which help to draw a general picture of Russian IBCs and the ideological motives from the perspective of the sending country, the literature on IBCs rarely considers the ways in which these rationales may, in turn, impact on wider questions of access, equity, quality, and justice or the development of HE in host countries in general as IBCs may represent strong private interests, as well as intentions to maintain political and cultural influence (Chankseliani, 2020).

Methodology

I used a qualitative method to collect comprehensive data about the phenomenon. I first examined publicly available documents, such as the decrees of the President and the Cabinet of Ministers (Uzbekistan), speeches, reports, state action plans, media reports, and other policy papers (of both countries) to understand how policy documents address the role of Russian IBCs. Through the critical discourse analysis of 74 macro- and meso-documents (based on purposive sampling), which included certain justifications and/or motivations, I aimed to identify

the themes related to the status and rationales of establishing Russian IBCs, the essentials of the partnership, responsibilities, and duties of both sides. In addition, I conducted semi-structured interviews with an official of the Ministry of HE, the university administrators (three people) and two lecturers of selected Russian IBCs to triangulate the findings and study their perceptions about the contribution of Russian IBCs to the development of HE.

The study employed a combination of opportunistic and snowball samplings. Initially, I contacted my colleagues, friends, and some relatives to identify people they know working at Russian IBCs and their willingness to participate in my study. I made a list of 14 people from four IBCs before I started my field trip. However, four people refused to participate when they were handed the subject information sheet and consent form considering my topic too sensitive. Three people requested to see my interview questions prior to the interview and all of them gave a negative response the next day. One person decided to withdraw from the study in the middle of my interview, stating that she was not able to respond to my questions. However, she referred to another person working in the same place, who participated in the interview. I made several changes to my interview questions to make them less sensitive and even removed the phrase 'political economy analysis' from my title on the subject information sheet. I eventually ended up with five people from three Russian IBCs and one person from the Ministry of HE.

Data Collection and Analysis

This project used different data collection methods—interviews, macro- and meso-level documents, and relevant literature. Given interviews are widely used as a data collection tool in qualitative research to gather information about participants' views, and perceptions, this study used semi-structured interviews as it is the best means of extrapolating the information needed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To collect macro- and meso-level documents, I accessed the websites of Russian IBCs and home universities and the websites of the Ministry of HE and other government institutions to identify relevant documents.

Data from the participants was collected in September 2022. The validity of the obtained data was verified through the triangulation of chosen methods. To increase trustworthiness, the coded themes were reviewed based on the feedback received from the PEER Network CA

Hub members and mentors during two workshops. They provided the etic viewpoint on the investigated phenomenon to complement the emic perspective of the author.

The collected data were analysed and organized according to the guidelines of General Analytical Framework for CDA by Mullet (2018). First, relevant macro- and meso-level documents were collected and analysed using critical discourse analysis to investigate the textual documents (Fairclough, 2013) and identify the policy agendas of home and host countries in establishing Russian IBCs in Uzbekistan. Second, audio-recorded interviews were transcribed after interviews were conducted and translated into English. The interviews were analysed using NVivo12 software. During the coding process, the thematic categories were used to align with the second research question.

Findings

Drivers of Expansion

The rationales of establishing IBCs vary depending on sending and receiving countries. To understand the agendas of home (Russian) and host (Uzbekistan) countries, the author used Qiang's (2003) and Knight's (2012) typology of rationales for internationalization at the national level. The analysis of legal and policy documents, agreements, media reports, articles, the speeches of officials, and individual interviews revealed multiple rationales and motivations for establishing Russian IBCs. These rationales were framed in the table that comprises political, socio-cultural, economic, and academic aspects (Table 11.1). Although some of the rationales might overlap, it is a useful tool to visualize and juxtapose the overall picture of the rationales at different levels. Based on these findings (and including interviews), the author developed 5 main policy agendas which are discussed below.

Policy Agenda 1: There Is a Shortage of University Places in Uzbekistan and IBCs Can Fill the Demand Quickly

One of the main problems, stated in the Concept of developing HE, was the low level of access to HE in Uzbekistan. The gross enrolment ratio (GER) was consistently below 9% for decades, even though the population of the country increased from about 21 million in 1991 to nearly 32 million by 2016 (World Bank, n.d.). Therefore, to meet this urgent need,

Table 11.1 The rationales of home and host countries for establishing IBCs in Uzbekistan

Rationale	Uzbekistan	Russian Federation
Political Promote national security & peace among nations Preserve and promote national culture and identity Peace and mutual understanding Technical assistance Foreign policy	**Weak (strategic)** Strengthening political ties to promote national security Expanding alliance and diplomatic relations Forging national identity Education as foreign policy (involvement of the Embassy of Uzbekistan) Long-term relationships, and Mutual strategic cooperation to maintain mutual understanding	**Strong** Creating a single Eurasian educational space (soft power) Integrating Uzbekistan into Eurasian Economic Union Preserving control Strengthening political ties Supporting 'compatriots' Russian language as soft power Public outreach (propaganda)
Economic Enhance economic, scientific & technological competitiveness Promote marketing/income generation from educational products & services Labour market Financial incentives	**Strong** Developing economic relations Qualified personnel training (oil & gas/mining/engineering, etc.) Training a professional workforce for industrial sector Promote the country as a regional hub	**Strong** Personnel training for Russian companies (oil & gas/mining/nuclear power/engineering) Training a professional workforce for key industry sectors **But** NOT financial incentives
Academic	**Strong**	**Weak**

Table 11.1 (continued)

Rationale	Uzbekistan	Russian Federation
International standards in teaching & research Enhancement of quality Profile and status Institution building Extension of academic horizon Ensure that research addresses international & national issues	Globally recognized quality education Qualified personnel training Academic exchange & integration Cooperation in different fields Developing scientific research International collaboration Training and retraining International reputation	Promoting the Russian education model Image/brand building Academic exchange & integration Fostering Russian language learning Talent seeking (student recruitment)
Cultural & Social Recognize and support cultural & ethnic diversity Contribute to individual social & community development Enhance intercultural relations & understanding Citizenship development Prepare graduates to be national and international citizens	**Weak** Strengthening cultural ties Public outreach *Citizenship development* (developing patriotic qualities) Teaching Uzbek language and history	**Strong** Strengthening cultural ties Promoting the Russian language as intercultural/ inter-ethnic language Public outreach (promoting Russian culture and traditions) Intercultural understanding (the interest in Uzbek language and culture)

the government projected to increase the access to 50% by 2030 (PD No. 5847, 2019). Establishing new IBCs was seen as one of the quick solutions, but this is a complex procedure which may take years to negotiate with home institutions. The first Uzbekistan-Russia Education forum and the agreement on establishing Russian IBCs simplified this procedure and accelerated the expansion of Russian IBCs. The interview results also approved the undersupply of university places as the main reason. One participant stated that it was a huge mistake to keep the GER below 9%, 'because most of our population is young and they were left neglected over the years: uneducated, unemployed… So, the current policies are being implemented to mitigate this crisis' (A1_M_1).

Policy Agenda 2: There Is An Undersupply in Certain
Industries—IBCs Can Fill the Void and Provide Employment Quickly

Along with educational reforms, Uzbekistan started massive economic reforms in 2016 which include expanding the oil and gas sector (e.g. establishment of Uzbekistan GTL plant), modernizing the mining industry, opening machinery and heavy equipment factories, building a nuclear power station, among others. There are newly emerging professions in the industry sector but most of the programmes offered by local HEIs do not meet the industry's needs. IBCs, in this regard, can offer new educational programmes by bringing the best practices of foreign institutions. It was not just symbolic to name the first Education forum '*New personnel for a new economy*'. The forum was attended not only by rectors of HEIs but also by the representatives of key industry sectors. The stakeholders of both sides discussed opening branch campuses which can train professionals particularly for certain industrial sectors. The former Minister of HE, A. Toshkulov, also mentioned this contribution of Russian IBCs noting that: 'We regard this as a significant contribution made by the Russian side to the training of qualified personnel for the *economy* of our country' (Sputnik Uzbekistan, 2021).

Policy Agenda 3: Internationalization of HE and further
Integration with Russia, Europe, and the World Is in Uzbekistan's
Interests

Internationalization is a core aspect of bringing foreign education to one's native soil. This is explicitly articulated in policy documents and the Concept of developing HE. The decrees on establishing Russian IBCs also include a wide range of internationalization aspects, including creating international academic standards, modernizing the facilities of universities, enhancing research, introducing new disciplines, building partnerships, academic mobility, and student exchange. Equally, the government hoped to mitigate the brain drain effect of youth by establishing IBCs at home because they can be an effective means of talent retention. By doing so, the authorities also aimed at retaining study investments in the country.

Apart from that, the government had an ambitious plan to create a regional education hub in CA and attract international students by establishing branches of leading universities (PD No. 5847, 2019). The administration of two Russian IBCs remarked that they have intentions

to accept students from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the future, highlighting the absence of branches in these countries. The Ministry official also expressed a similar point stating that expansion of the Russian IBCs was a strategic action to attract students from neighbouring countries.

Policy Agenda 4: Enhancing Learning and Teaching of the Russian Language

The language policy is another factor why the focus was on expanding Russian IBCs specifically. Even though the Russian language is not an official language in Uzbekistan, it is widely used in government offices and business, and taught as the second language at public schools. It is also used as a language of inter-ethnic communication. Switching to the Latin alphabet and the exodus of Russian-speaking people in the 1990s considerably diminished the role of the Russian language, especially in rural areas. This, in turn, resulted in the weakening of Russian language at schools in regions. Therefore, one of the missions of expanding Russian IBCs was to improve the teaching and learning of the Russian language, as was discussed in the second Education Forum. During the forum, the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation reported the launch of a large-scale project 'Klass' and 'Malysh' with the participation of a charitable foundation of a Russian oligarch (of Uzbek origin), Alisher Usmonov, to expand access to quality teaching in the Russian language (Minprosvesheniya, 2021). Usmonov is also attributed to finance the establishment of two branches, Moscow State Institute of International Relations and Russian State Pedagogical University (RSPU), and the latter was purposely opened to enhance the teaching of Russian.

The role of the Russian language was also highlighted as a main factor by interviewees. Interestingly, one of the respondents linked the language problem with the practice of Uzbek migrants in the Russian Federation:

> We have millions of Uzbek migrants working in Russia, and most of them don't know Russian well and struggle with finding a job or daily lives because of the poor Russian language education they received at school. So, the Hertsen University branch was opened to enhance learning and teaching the Russian language from the pre-school level. (A1_M_1)

There is strong support for developing the language by the Russian-speaking intelligentsia as well. Russian has been a lingua franca in academia for decades and still has a dominant status in specific fields such

as hard sciences. Since Uzbek science is largely grounded in the Soviet system, the dependence of HE on Russian academia is still visible. The interviews also demonstrated how the authorities and the older generation of academics were bound to the Russian education system, and therefore actively supported the expansion of Russian IBCs. For example, one of the interviewees pointed out how Uzbekistan's education system is tightly connected to Russian system, stating that:

> Most of the references, books, and textbooks used at local HEIs and even their courses/programs are translated or borrowed from Russian universities. Our Academy of Sciences, Higher Attestation Committee and even the Ministry [of HE] follow the same system in Russia. Because the Russian education system is one of the best, like it was in the Soviet period, most established scholars and policymakers favour and collaborate with the Russian education system. (L1_F_4)

This is also indicative of romanticizing Soviet education and can explain the demand for education in Russian language as 'Soviet education is still explicitly described as the "good old" system, offering hope to overcome the current educational crisis' (Silova, 2011, p. 10).

Policy Agenda 5: Securing Supply of Labour, Geopolitical Influence, Aspirations to Recreate the Greater Russia in Russia's Interest

The Russian government sees the export of HE as soft power to increase its political influence and control in countries of their interest (Chankseliani, 2020). The political ideology and imperial ambitions of Russia are widely discussed topics in the current literature. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Soviet education played a significant role in uniting all former socialist countries through the ideology of communism against western capitalist countries. The fall of the Soviet Union and the representation of Russia as an 'aggressor state' are the two main factors that made the current government to rethink their education policies and expand their soft power through Russian language, education (IBCs), and public diplomacy to rebuild the positive image of Russia (Semedov & Kurbatova, 2020). In addition, Rosstrudnichestvo, the federal agency of Russia which coordinates the public diplomacy activities, is also involved in the process. The Russian media reports this educational cooperation as 'humanitarian cooperation'. However, this 'humanitarian' cooperation is not philanthropic aid for the people of Uzbekistan, but it is more political

as the core mission of Rosstrudnichestvo is to support Russian 'compatriots' intellectually and professionally in foreign countries and forge new relationships through compatriots (Semedov & Kurbatova, 2020). Finally, expanding IBCs in the post-Soviet space is significant from a geopolitical perspective, as Russia aims to create a single Eurasian HE region against China's Belt and Road initiative (Leskina & Sabzalieva, 2021).

In addition to political advantages, IBCs have a greater economic return to the Russian Federation. First, Russian universities are not investing in building premises, providing equipment and facilities, and maintenance of branch campuses. Due to the agreement of establishing Russian IBCs, the Uzbekistan side takes the responsibility of financing the material resources of the campuses, paying teachers' salaries, and funding the tuition fees of students like local HEIs. So, there is no risk of economic failure for Russian universities. Secondly, Russia still sees Uzbekistan as a raw-material base for its economy as it was in the Soviet period. Natural resources of Uzbekistan have always been strategically important for Russia. From this perspective, Russia is training qualified personnel for key industrial sectors in Uzbekistan through IBCs as most of the Russian IBCs are industry oriented: mining, metallurgy, oil and gas, (nuclear) power engineering, machinery, chemistry, and material science. Some of the Russian IBCs are directly tied to these industrial sectors as a mechanism of preparing the workforce which is clear evidence of Soviet legacy. Historically, Soviet HE served as a nationwide feeder of a professional workforce for each industrial sector or social service (Kuraev, 2016). This in turn, increases the dependence of the Uzbek economy to Russian HE, because once the chain of this 'conveyor' is broken, it will affect the local economy as well. So, these IBCs are contributing not only to the economy of Uzbekistan, but also benefit the Russian economy in the long term. Even more interesting is that some of the Russian giant companies, such as Gazprom, already hold shares in these strategic industrial sectors. This means some of the Russian IBCs may be directly contributing to the Russian economy. Thirdly, as students receive education solely in Russian, it is highly likely that they may choose Russia as a career destination in the future, eventually leading to brain drain. One might argue that students graduating from these institutions may opt to build their careers outside the Russian Federation. However, it is also important to note that countries agreed on qualification recognition in 2019 (Lex.uz, 2019). For graduates who received education in Russian as a medium of instruction,

employment opportunities in Russia are much higher than in any other country.

Overall, the review of policy documents and media reports demonstrates that the expansion of Russian IBCs involves several home and host-country agendas. It shows that the education forums were the key moment for the rapid expansion of Russian IBCs. The emergence of Russian branch campuses, as compared to other IBCs in the country, was predominantly politically driven and the involvement of the governments played a main role in this cooperative engagement. This cooperation is not limited to creating IBCs. In fact, the number of signed partnerships with local HEIs during the education forums shows that the Russian side wants more integration of the Russian education system into local HE, and eventually more control of academia and soft power by preparing the future 'elites' (Sadovnichiy, 2017). Therefore, educational collaboration in the form of IBCs is more beneficial to Russian stakeholders rather than assisting to achieve the desired objectives of the Uzbek side.

The Effectiveness of IBCs

The interviews also provided some insights about general features of Russian IBCs and their role in HE development. The overall perceptions of all respondents regarding the Russian IBCs were positive, but some of them considered that the current number of Russian branches was more than sufficient. When asked about the contributions, respondents could not provide examples except preparing personnel in specific fields and introducing new programmes. The study avoids making claims on the ineffectiveness of Russian IBCs and the quality of education they provide, yet based on the interviews with lecturers and administration, two general themes emerged which might explain some deficiencies of these institutions.

First, incorporating Russian education through IBCs seems to be largely inefficient. The governance of IBCs is very similar to home institutions' management system: centralized, bureaucratic, and relies on one-person management (controlled by local rectors). The local stakeholders are usually not involved in decision-making, although the administration stated that they have the right to make suggestions. The main concern, however, is related to teaching the core subjects. All administrative staff informed that there is a regulation requiring 60% of the courses (only core programmes) to be taught by academic staff from home institutions.

These staff work at IBCs as seconded academic staff teaching remotely or providing short-term (maximum one month) intensive classes in person. Local staff, on the other hand, provide mostly host-country courses, such as the Uzbek language, history, and English. Although the administration justified the reliance on fly-in-fly-out staff with the expertise and qualifications of Russian faculty, local lecturers raised the issues of inefficient learning and disruption of local teachers' teaching schedule:

> During that one month, students will have the courses of those professors only and other modules are halted. The professors teach one-semester/ year material in a month intensively and assess students by written exams or oral zachets [a simplified form of knowledge evaluation at the end of the semester/course]. And these classes are held every day non-stop and for students of course this will be boring and ineffective as they will lose their motivation and interest. Students complain as they get tired and demotivated. (L2_M_5)

In addition, all participants noted that Russian IBCs were only teaching oriented without a focus on research. Even though the function of research has been particularly emphasized in policy documents, the findings show that the research activity is impractical in Russian IBCs as they are highly reliant on fly-in-fly-out faculty. Limited collegiality between local staff and the faculty of home institutions also curbed the research collaboration, which resulted in low level of research productivity. The only positive aspect, as mentioned by the administration, was the supervision of graduating students by high profile professors from home universities.

Second, Russian IBCs have become more local rather than international. One of the respondents remarked the division of roles in managing the IBCs as an offset against political influence: making the home university accountable for only academic matters. This structure, in turn, made the Russian IBCs bound to local authorities and act like local HEIs. One of the lecturers described this as follows:

> I think we are also becoming more local. Even students recognized that we act more like local universities. Discipline is very strong, even in dormitories. Attendance is mandatory. We have parental meetings to control students. Uniforms are strictly regulated. We have the same regulations as local universities in this respect. (L1_F_4)

As outlined above, tight regulations, uniforms, parental meetings, strong discipline, and strict attendance regulations are all common patterns that can be observed in local HEIs. Other participants also pointed out similar directives but one of the administration staff expressed this in a stronger way, saying 'uniformity is must, and no divergence is tolerated'. These features are not alien to Russian universities too as most of them are attributed to Soviet legacy and referred to as 'the army-style organisational format' (Kuraev, 2016, p. 183).

However, it would be wrong to ignore the contribution of Russian HE to the capacity development of certain subjects in the receiving country too. Indeed, Russian education has great potential in certain fields and the universities like LMSU, St. Petersburg State University, and National University of Science and Technology are leading universities in the region. When establishing the branches of such top universities, the policymakers also probably assumed that they would bring the same quality. Yet, when it comes to IBCs, they are generally believed to be incapable of replicating the standards of home universities, especially 'the ethos of home campus' (Altbach & de Wit, 2020, p. 15). Considering the funding constraints and the reliance of Russian IBCs on fly-in-fly-out staff, the quality of education remains under question. Thus, importing Russian HE to Uzbekistan has become a tool of developing public diplomacy and cultural links between countries and serving the benefits of a small Russian-speaking community rather than developing internationalization strategies by bringing the home country's pedagogies and education policies.

Conclusions

Overall, the findings indicate that Uzbekistan's main target was fulfilling the shortage of university places, training professionals for industry purposes, internationalizing and integrating with other countries, and enhancing the Russian language, whereas Russia seems to be interested in political control, supporting the compatriots, and training the labour force for certain industry sectors which are mutually beneficial. At the same time, the identified agendas reveal some other factors that played a major role in the progression of policies, such as the involvement of government, the support from an older generation of academics, and the influence of Russian-speaking intelligentsia. This also explains that strengthening HE partnerships with Russia and the expansion of IBCs

was based on mutual agreement. Indeed, Uzbekistan is dependent on Russian education in many ways. However, policymakers should be aware of the implications of close cooperation with an existing regional hegemonic power as related political and economic risks may increase the dependency of the country on Russian HE.

There is much discrepancy in the rhetoric of establishing Russian IBCs versus the realization of policies (implementation). Interviews with local staff disclosed several characteristics that diminish Russian IBCs' effectiveness in realizing certain internationalization objectives, such as research activity, quality of teaching, and international collaboration. The reliance on fly-in-fly-out faculty is also alarming as the sustainability of IBCs rests on the stability of academic staff. The expansion of programmes and students will require the availability of more staff. Exceptional events like the Russia-Ukraine war and the isolation of Russian HE can make the situation even worse.

The study has several limitations. The small number of interviews does not represent all Russian IBCs; therefore, the study avoids generalizing conclusions about the quality of education for all IBCs. There is a need for extensive research to identify the quality of education at all IBCs and their potential implications for the development of HE. Future research may include studying the motivations of students for selecting Russian IBCs, and their perceptions regarding the quality of education and services. Additionally, researchers may focus on the new players in the IBC market, such as South Korea and India, the countries which have increased their presence in recent years.

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Examination of the Financial Sustainability of NGOs' Education Programmes: Kazakhstani Case Study

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INTRODUCTION

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Central Asian nations like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan were compelled to become independent. It led to confusion in the political system, economic decline, and social changes. While each country chose its own path and reconsidered the opportunities to promote national development, the changes reinforced and uncovered pre-existing social issues that had been hidden for many years. The issues included corruption, a huge economic gap between rich and poor, inter-ethnic conflict, gender inequality, and political disagreement (Tabaeva et al., 2021). In this context, the newly formed civil society aimed to address the absence of social services once provided by the Soviet state, protect and develop civil liberties, and tackle rising poverty and income inequality levels.

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227

In contrast to Western civil societies with a rich development history working independently and in partnership with the government, the history of the non-government organisation (NGO) sector in each Central Asian country has little more than thirty years of existence (Odihr & Poland, 2000). The development of civil society in Central Asian countries exhibits resemblance due to shared traditional practices and institutions in the region, alongside common legislative, economic, and administrative structures inherited from the Soviet period (Giffen et al., 2005). However, NGOs' activities and challenges differed and reflected each country's context and political development. For example, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan became embroiled in a civil war that affected almost every family in the country. Civil Society organisations have played a crucial role in the healing process where the war's legacy shapes NGOs' agenda, with much of their attention focused on dealing with displaced populations and the trauma of broken homes (Sasykbaeva et al., 2003). While in Uzbekistan, civil society has not yet become a significant force due to highly restrictive legislation under a strong authoritarian regime. As a result, many international NGOs that operated in the country between the 1990s and early 2000s were closed and expelled (ICNL, 2022). In 2005, many local NGOs went through re-registration, which resulted in a notable decrease in their number (ICNL, 2022). Despite the small number of NGOs in the country, their work was still recognised as necessary (Giffen et al., 2005).

Nevertheless, among the various significant challenges faced by NGOs across all Central Asian countries, one is common—the sustainability and financial support for their activities. At the beginning of the 1990s, international donors funded various activities in the sector. However, they later reduced spending and reallocated funding to different regions like Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. Sustainability became one of the main issues for local NGOs to survive and maintain their activities (Alymkulova & Seipulnik, 2005). This chapter aims to look through the lens of interconnected forms of injustice and financial issues. It intends to deepen the understanding of the work of NGOs within the education sector in the Kazakhstani context.

The main research question is as follows: To what extent does financial sustainability shape and impact NGO education programmes in Kazakhstan? Two overarching themes are addressed through the questions: (1) To what extent does the development of regulations, policies, and

laws contribute towards economic (in)justice?; (2) In what ways do NGOs face financial challenges and address economic issues?

The study presents empirical findings explaining the different types of distribution injustice NGOs face and how this might impact social cohesion within local society.

Historical Development of NGOs in Kazakhstan: Background

The non-governmental sector was established in the time referred to as *perestroika* when the prototype of the first NGOs emerged in society (Diachenko, 2007; Saktaganova & Ospanova, 2013). The authors agreed that the development of the NGO sector was directly linked to the political, social, and economic changes when the republic moved towards obtaining independence and took its first steps towards future democratic reforms (Zhovtis, 2021). Unlike the Soviet societies and unions, which were connected to the Communist party, shared the same system of values, and followed specific tasks (Giffen et al., 2005), the first-established NGOs were independent. It was the first time in many years that people could openly voice their thoughts and unite under a common cause. Many of them not only addressed issues related to human rights protection, freedom of speech, and corruption (Zhovtis, 2021) but also social issues like the environment (Nevada Semey, an anti-nuclear movement focused on the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site in 1990) or health (Diabetic Association) (ADB, 2007; Kabdiyeva, 2013). In response to a growing focus on rediscovering national culture and identity in Kazakhstan and increased national consciousness, some organisations such as Adilet, Memorial, and Zheltoksan focused on history and education (Giffen et al., 2005).

The number of Kazakhstani NGOs and their areas of impact grew over time. It started with approximately 400 non-governmental organisations in the middle of the 1980s, and the number increased fourfold by 1997 (Pierobon, 2016). Responding to the sector's rapid development, the first national legislation on Public Associations was introduced in 1996 (latest amendment of 2022) (*Law on Public Associations*, 1996), identifying their general characteristics, outlining their rights, liabilities, establishment, reorganisation, and termination of public association. It highlighted that non-registered work of the organisations is forbidden (Kabdiyeva & Dixon, 2014). In 2001, the official term for non-profit

and non-governmental organisations in Kazakhstan was defined as non-commercial organisations (NCOs) (*Law on Non-Commercial Organisations*, 2001). While the critical document, the Concept on State Support for NGOs, which created the conditions for the sustainable development of the NGO sector, was adopted in 2003. To increase transparency in the formation and implementation of the state social order, facilitate the interaction between the government and NGOs, and reinforce the institutional and organisational basis for supporting the development of the civil society organisations (CSO) sector, which includes NGOs, the Kazakh government adopted the Concept of Civil Society Development in Kazakhstan for 2006–2011. Finally, the Ministry of Information and Public Development in Kazakhstan amended the regulation on the CSO database on 21 September 2022, simplifying the reporting process for CSOs. However, new provisions also require CSOs to provide information about charitable donations or sponsorship received, causing concern among CSOs who claim that the new provision was implemented without conducting a risk assessment of the CSO sector (ICNL, 2023).

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The role of civil societies in education is widely discussed in the literature from different perspectives, including their critical role in education policy agenda setting, policy formulation and implementation (Tarozzi, 2020), the contribution of education to social change (Bourn, 2022), and to post-war or post-conflict peacebuilding and social cohesion (Novelli et al., 2014). A limited amount of literature covers the role of Kazakhstani NGOs as one of the many civil society actors and their contribution to providing a small number of education programmes, focusing on leadership, gender equality, and youth development (Abdusalyamova & Warren, 2007; Giffen et al., 2005). Moreover, there is very little research on the role of NGOs within conflict-affected contexts, where the conflict is considered from the perspective of "positive peace" (Galtung, 1976). Galtung highlighted a significant differentiation between two types of peace: "negative peace", which refers to the absence of violence, and "positive peace", which involves implementing societal changes to address injustices that may trigger violence (Novelli & Smith, 2022).

To analyse the economic issues underpinning education sector NGOs within a conflict-affected context, a 4Rs framework (Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation) was chosen in this study

(Fraser, 2005; Novelli et al., 2015). The first 3Rs are built on the work of Nancy Fraser (2005), which helps to analyse and understand the different dimensions of the "drivers of conflict". She has proposed the concept of social justice as "parity of participation" (Fraser, 2005, p. 73), which can only be achieved by addressing three interconnected forms of injustice. The first type of injustice relates to the socio-economic domain and the necessity of redistributing material resources, goods, or services to rectify it. The second type of injustice focuses on cultural domination, misrecognition, and disrespect towards marginalised social groups. Addressing this type of injustice requires recognising and affirming the differences between these groups. The third form of injustice focuses on (mis)representation of specific individuals and groups from decision-making processes, institutions, and membership, addressing political marginalisation and exclusion (Fraser, 2005). Novelli et al. (2015) have further explored these three forms of injustice within the post-conflict context and expanded the framework by adding the Reconciliation domain, emphasising that a process of reconciliation that addresses historical and present tensions, grievances, and injustices is needed to achieve social justice. The fourth R—Reconciliation—helps us explore the "legacies of conflict" in relation to education, which, together with the "drivers of conflict", can tackle the issues and bring changes within economic, social, and political areas (Novelli et al., 2015).

The approach presented above uses dimensions of redistribution, recognition, representation, and reconciliation inter-connectedly, considering the particularity of political and economic conditions and the dynamics of conflict in each country, in our case—Kazakhstan. Although discussion of sustainability issues, focusing on the redistribution of resources and opportunities within the education sector NGOs, can be separated for analytical purposes, the cultural domains of recognition, political representation, and opportunities for the process of reconciliation should be considered together. For example, the unequal redistribution of funding and poor recognition of cultural diversity among NGO communities might lead to the misrepresentation of certain groups of individuals (possibly from ethnic minorities and marginalised groups) in the decision-making process at all levels of society. While the process of reconciliation, which focuses on the emerging economic issues within a conflict-affected context, might be solved by developing and applying the related economic policies to reduce financial inequality or, as in this paper, will lead to uncovering other issues like the reproduction of unequal access to education and disparity.

Methodology

The study utilises a mixed research approach (Johnson & Christensen, 2020) to obtain a comprehensive and diverse perspective on the main research question. Multiple data collection methods were used to understand the work of Kazakhstani NGOs in the education sector. The study was planned as a pilot with a small sample of survey and deep case study examination. A broad overview of various NGOs allows for an understanding of the education areas within the sector, the agents, and actors involved, and the programmes aimed at addressing crises and conflicts such as inequality and injustice. The official government database[1] and documents provided by the Ministry of Information and Public Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2022)[2] were analysed to understand the broader picture of NGOs working in the country, the area of their work and what issues they target. The NGOs were invited to participate in an online survey and share their perspectives on various topics relevant to the larger study. The survey consisted of structured and open questions. It covered a range of topics, including questions relevant to this chapter about funding and financial issues. In total, 59 NGOs from different areas of development fully completed a short online survey. Only 38 provided various education programmes, including training, workshops, and courses. The purpose of a small non-probability sample was not to generalise the study findings but to gather broad information by reaching out to a significant number of NGOs working in Kazakhstan which was not possible through qualitative methods. It also allowed the study to produce a snapshot of the analysis of the major challenges within the sustainability issues.

While the quantitative method provided an overview of the NGO activities, the qualitative method aimed to gain an "insight" into understanding the NGO experience in providing a certain type of education, including factors (political, economic, and social triggers) that influenced their choice, mission, motivations, outcomes, and their role and contribution within a peacebuilding context. The research purposely

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[1] All the official information about the work of NGOs in Kazakhstan was taken from https://infonpo.gov.kz/web/guest/otkrytyj-reestr.

[2] The research organisation requested statistics about the number of NGOs working in Kazakhstan and the categories of their activities from the Ministry of Information and Public Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan in October 2022.

selected three Kazakhstani NGOs from different regions of Kazakhstan (Almaty, Astana, and Shymkent) to represent different financial operating systems and for the diversity of educational work they provide. All three organisations have a history of working in Kazakhstan (from 10 to 30 years). They developed and implemented their unique education programmes, focusing on different education sectors (non-formal/informal) and areas of education (civil society, volunteerism, and English courses). The understanding of the NGOs' experiences in providing specific types of education and ongoing funding issues was gained through semi-structured interviews with NGOs' leaders, independent experts, and focused groups of educators. Additionally, a document analysis of the educational programmes (curricula, learning plans, and lessons) and the organisation's website, social media, and other sources helped to understand their purpose, motivation, and mission.

The study was conducted in July 2022 with ethical approval from the University of Ulster. All participants provided informed consent, with measures in place to protect their confidentiality. Each person was given a pseudonym which does not reflect their race, age, or gender. The organisations are anonymised and only referred to as A, B, and C.

Financial Sustainability of NGOs in Kazakhstan

This part is divided into two sections. The first section provides an analysis and discussion of the development of economic regulation policies and laws underpinning the work of Kazakh NGOs. The second presents various forms of financial support and their associated challenges. Brief examples of how financial situations impact education programmes are discussed.

The Development of Regulatory Policies and Laws

At the beginning of the 1990s, due to dramatic economic changes in Kazakhstan, international funds became the primary financial source for established or newly formed NGOs in Kazakhstan (Kabdiyeva & Dixon, 2014). Due to "large-scale financial support of NGO activity by international funds through a grant system" (Saktaganova & Ospanova, 2013: p. 1278), organisations had the opportunity to develop and deliver free programmes to support their initiatives as organisations and address local issues. The areas included human rights and the environment

(Saktaganova & Ospanova, 2013). They also contributed to capacity development training for NGO leaders to improve their skills and knowledge in managing and administering the sector (Pierobon, 2016). Even though international funds did not focus on education programmes as such (Marat, head of NGO-C), the educational element existed as one of the "side products", of the tasks within the project (Lea, an independent expert in international law).

At the beginning of the 2000s, the relationship between civil society and the government in Kazakhstan changed, and, for the first time, state grants for non-profit organisations were made available. Governments in the Central Asian region, specifically Uzbekistan (Giffen et al., 2005), linked events like the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia (2003) and the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine" (2004), where civil society played an important role, to the work of international funds. According to Lea, the same events also impacted the attitude of the Kazakh government towards international funds. The Kazakh government's primary motivation for providing funds to support civil society organisations was to compete with international donors (Makhmutova & Akhmetova, 2011) by limiting the influence of international funds and expanding the control over the work of local NGOs in Kazakhstan.

> Only after the colour revolutions of 2003, 2004 and 2005, respectively, in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, the state began to build barriers to foreign funding. Then, in the mid-2000s, a new law on non-governmental organisations was passed that regulated funding. At that time, partial public funding was already gradually being introduced. More funding for NGOs from the state was introduced in 2015. (Lea, independent expert)

Lea referred to the fact that in 2005, a legal framework for the state to finance civil society organisations was adopted in the Law on State Social Contracts. Initially, the Ministry of Communications and Information was the primary ministry providing government funding to NGOs. Other ministries, such as Education and Science, Health, and Ecology, have gradually started financing NGOs and supporting projects in their respective sectors. For instance, in 2009, the Ministry of Education and Science allocated social contracting funds worth 266 million tenges (equivalent to $2 million) and the Ministry of Health had social contracts worth 40 million tenges (equivalent to $308,000) (Kabdiyeva & Dixon, 2014).

While state funding for civil society organisations (SCOs) has significantly increased since the early 2000s, with about $8.8 million available for social projects in 2022, the government has gradually increased its control over CSOs' funding (ICNL, 2023). For example, in 2015, in addition to their activities and key managers, CSOs were required to submit annual reports that included a list of their funders. A year later, the Tax Code for NGOs introduced new reporting requirements that NGOs must notify the tax authorities and provide information on the receipt and expenditure of foreign funds/assets. Additionally, publications produced with support from foreign funds must be labelled as such, and non-compliance with these requirements may lead to severe administrative penalties. In late 2020–early 2021, the Law on Payments, for the first time, was enforced against human rights organisations when thirteen organisations were penalised for misreporting funds received from abroad and their expenditure (FLD, 2021; ICNL, 2023). Front Line Defenders (FLD) (2021) explained that penalties were issued for inconsistencies in the financial data presented in NGOs' tax declaration forms. However, these disparities were attributable to various factors, such as fluctuations in exchange rates, the return of unutilised funds to donors, and a single instance of erroneously duplicating a donation from a single donor. In 2022, civil society organisations, including human rights groups, were actively discussing the proposed amendments and additions to the Constitutional Laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Asautay, 2022). With parliamentary elections scheduled for 2021 and presidential elections for 2022, one of the proposed amendments was related to preventing foreign interference in the preparation and conduct of elections (*The Introduction of Amendments and Additions to Constitutional Laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Implementation the Questions Addressing by the Head of State on 16th March 2022*, 2022). This amendment raised concerns that CSOs receiving funds from international sources may be disqualified by the Central Election Commission from serving as independent observers during the elections (Matveeva, 2022).

Challenges with NGOs' Financial Structures

The survey responses show that NGOs in Kazakhstan have different sources of funding to support their projects. The top three are funding from international grants, including INGO and small grants from

embassies, business and social enterprises, and Kazakh sources, including the state (see Fig. 12.1).

It is important to notice that ten NGOs have hybrid sources of funding when two or three different types of support are used to run their projects. Examples include funding from international and state sources or social enterprises and donations.

Out of the 57 NGOs surveyed, 38 organisations provide different educational programmes. Almost half of the surveyed organisations deliver different types of training to around 100 people annually. Approximately 36% of them taught between 100 and 600 people, 8%—between 600 and 1000, and 10%—more than 1000 people. Eighty-two percent of organisations suggested that training and educational programmes were provided for free, around 3% were paid, and 15% had both paid and free programmes.

The survey findings reveal that NGOs' educational initiatives in the education domain are shaped by various factors, including their expertise, funding opportunities, and societal demands. Notably, the analysis shown in Figure 12.2 demonstrates that these programmes mainly arise from the convergence of NGOs' specialised knowledge and societal needs.

Additionally, it is important to mention that only a small fraction of organisations take funding sources into account when designing
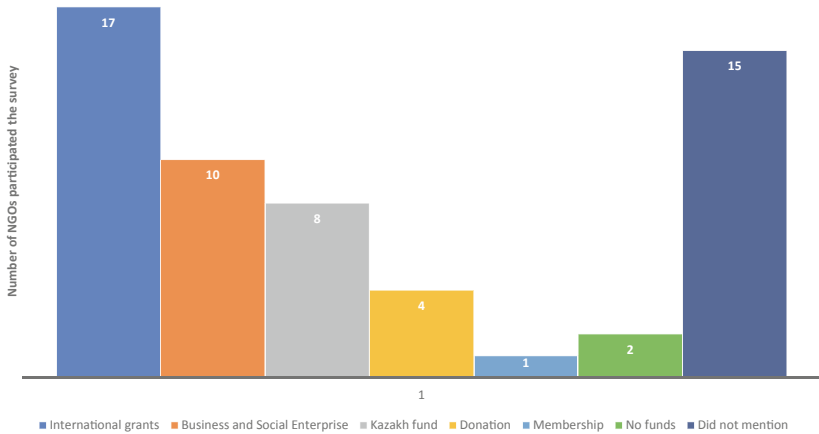
Fig. 12.1 The funding sources of NGOs in Kazakhstan
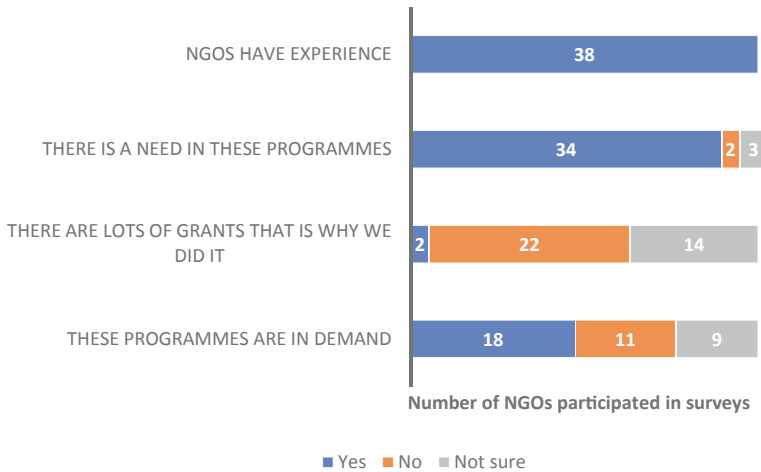
Fig. 12.2 The rationale for NGOs developing their programmes

and implementing educational programmes. Despite organisations' confidence that the developed programmes meet society's needs, it is intriguing to note that less than half of these initiatives are in actual demand.

International and State Funding

Two organisations participating in this study developed various educational programmes to promote their organisational purposes: human rights and volunteerism. However, to fund them, they have to search for financial support every year by either receiving long-term international grants or short-term project-based state or international support. For example, the independent human rights organisation has its work supported by international bodies: 30% from institutional (long-term) grants and 70% from project-based (short-term) grants. Trainer Ali shared that he has never been a full-time trainer despite working for this organisation since 1998 and devoting a significant part of their time to human rights education.

> Unfortunately, such work in our office is not funded. Why? Because those who provide support for human rights development do not have a positive attitude to education and do not want it will be done with their grant support. (Ali, trainer, NGO-C)

Lea suggested that NGOs working on human rights do not receive grants from the state, mainly because the funders have inflexible conditions for receiving them. Similarly, NGO-B does not have consistent financial support. However, despite financial sustainability issues, sometimes they intentionally do not apply for state grants. Zhanar, the leader of NGO-B, pointed out two major challenges with the current funding situation. Firstly, the grants they receive are relatively small and cannot contribute significantly to the project's quality, growth, and sustainability compared to the larger international funding. Secondly, public funds are usually only given for a short time, which is insufficient for creating, developing, and implementing the project. Overall, NGOs often have their goals and missions, which may not always align with the requirements of the grants available to them, leaving them with a difficult choice. As Lea suggested, this can lead to the NGO spending all of its time on the donor's requirements and becoming distracted from implementing its public interest.

The unequal distribution of grants and competition exacerbates the situation. After public grants became available to all Kazakhstani NGOs, they attracted organisations that regularly work in the field and those only interested in obtaining funding. These latter organisations were referred to as "grant-eaters" ("grantoezhki" in Russian). They moved from one initiative to another, driven solely by funding availability.

> It is fashionable; it is on the 'wave'…So many organisations were opened just because it was the year of the volunteer. And the decline goes accordingly because the year of the volunteer was over. Grantoezhki all left, and those who had worked before remained. (Zhanar, leader of NGO-B)

The expert further discussed the issue of government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGO), which always have better chances of receiving project funding.

> They are created by former civil servants, relatives or friends of existing civil servants. I have repeatedly noted that such NGOs win all the state grants and competitions for the state social order. (Lea, independent expert)

Finally, Lea shared her experience with facing another form of unfair funding distribution. Once, she was unsuccessful in applying for "children protection in education" funding. The NGO that received the grant

had no expertise in the area but had a connection to one of the prominent people in the human rights sector. Overall, the environment in the sector is "toxic", where some NGOs that exist for extended periods are overpowering those with shorter experience.

> Those who stay at the "feeder" for a long time are afraid of young NGOs. They always mock them, write negative reports, and try to close them so that they won't take their piece of the pie. The environment is very, very toxic. It seems people focus on earning money instead of helping people. (Lea, independent expert)

In our interview, Lea suggested two ways of breaking this continuing cycle of "survival" for NGOs. One was to take a path of "diversification", where the NGO team members have paid work and volunteer for the NGO. Another way is to blend social enterprise principles into the work of NGOs.

Social Enterprise

The 1996 law on Public Associations (*Law on Public Associations*, 1996) explicitly stated and later in 2001 affirmed that a public association had the right to engage in commercial activities to fulfil their statutory goals. One of the organisations that chose a hybrid approach, a combination of paid and free education, was NGO-A. From its establishment, the organisation adopted a social entrepreneurship form of financial support. The executive director, Igor, explained:

> English courses, including different levels from beginner to advanced, are paid for, and they went very well. All the other [here and further notes from author, projects] are social… educational initiatives like Expeditions [HIV/AIDs experience], "Struggle for Survival", and social club [for people with disabilities]. They are all always free. (Igor, head of NGO-A)

Engagement in business activities provided them with the means to cover their overhead costs, recruit highly skilled employees, and achieve self-sufficiency without depending on external aid. It, in turn, allowed them to concentrate on their social initiatives. In the early 1990s, due to the economic downturn and its impact on education spending, which led to a lack of skill development and inadequate quality of secondary and higher education (Silova, 2010), NGO-A took up the task of providing English courses.

There was unemployment; there were no skills... Even now, we still have a strong demand for English courses. People need that skill". (Igor, head of NGO-A)

According to Zhana, head of the English department in NGO-A, more than 50% of their students are motivated to improve their academic performance. This is largely due to the belief among parents that English is a crucial language that their children must learn, regardless of the school curriculum. A large group of students enrol to prepare for standardised tests such as IELTS and FLEX, while others seek to learn the language itself.

As the courses became profitable and met the organisation's needs, the English department was able to operate without external funding, including public or volunteer work. This enabled the organisation to hire professional staff to deliver English courses and implement social projects. Despite a regular income, the salary of the staff and teachers was half and, in some cases, a quarter of a similar salary in schools or other organisations. Igor suggested that they lacked financial literacy and expertise and, overall, were not "good businessmen". Working with the community, addressing social issues including but not limited to concern about the HIV/AIDs rate rapidly rising in the region, extreme poverty, and the issues with the disabled community in the city, NGO-A struggled to "raise prices on [English] courses" (Igor, head of NGO-A) while making them affordable for many. At the same time, they admitted that people who paid for the courses are "elite and rich", or as one teacher said, someone "whose basic needs are covered, when they have a roof over their head, parents, clothing and food" (Tash, teacher, NGO-A). Further discussion with teachers and the head of the organisation also indicated that they clearly understood that the paid education programmes might aggravate societal inequality. The head of the organisation shared that even he cannot afford these courses for his child. Nevertheless, despite creating inequality, the NGO tried to mitigate it to some extent. They created a social work "system" by offering up to fifteen scholarships and discounts for those who cannot afford their studies. It included their staff who could use the privilege of working in the organisation to have free-of-charge programmes for their children.

Conclusion

This study presents a snapshot of the findings focusing on the financial sustainability of Kazakhstani NGOs offering education programmes. This chapter explicitly explored the different types of injustice related to the sustainability of education programmes provided by NGOs. By discussing some of the current challenges, NGOs face in their ongoing financial struggles, the social-economic, cultural, and political areas of injustice examination provided multi-layered insights. The findings showed how different funding sources underpin and shape the NGOs' vision for providing education programmes.

Redistributive injustice should be approached not only from the understanding of a lack of financial support for NGOs, instability, or issues of dependency on international funds (Alymkulova & Seipulnik, 2005; Saktaganova & Ospanova, 2013). Representation and reconciliation are needed to understand "why" and "how" such injustices can be addressed. Representation of GONGOs and "grant-eaters" organisations might create unfair access to state funding. While the umbrella approach, when the organisation has a prominent person on their trustee board, might create unequal competition in any grant support environment, where knowledge, experience, and expertise might not be considered in contrast with respect and relation to one person. As Lea argued, it creates a highly competitive and unequal funding distribution.

Furthermore, the legislation development, specifically relating to the work of independent NGOs, explicitly led to the political exclusion of those organisations funded by international funds. It creates a "negative" attitude from the state, making it extremely difficult to access state funding. On the other hand, it is not surprising that NGOs, which do not have support from the state, also do not have support from the community (Gusarova, 2016).

One way of changing this practice is to find a way to merge social enterprise business with the work of NGOs (Alymkulova & Seipulnik, 2005). However, as the study showed, a social enterprise might solve the sustainability problems but create another inequality issue of access to quality education. Although the NGOs quite quickly recognised and addressed the new issue, this example shows how another "create-solve" cycle might be created within society. Thus, the analysis suggested that each social enterprise programme should go beyond just addressing the

financial needs of the NGO and consider whether or not this new project might create another injustice within or outside the NGO.

The implications of the study findings for the financial sustainability of NGOs in Kazakhstan are related to the ways resources are supported and distributed. While the sustainability of civil society organisations was somehow addressed by state legislation, it did not consider the context-specific factors of cultural diversity, such as different languages, ethnic groups, and representation of different groups of society in the decision-making process. To facilitate an equitable grant selection process, it is necessary to reconsider the criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of NGOs, placing emphasis on their strong expertise and experience. Additionally, it is important to pay attention to and address the issues of imbalanced access to education, which might be created by developing and implementing the education programme strategy by NGOs. Financial support at the micro-level is one of the ways to consider those with limited access to educational programmes. Although the form of scholarships and stipends, and other approaches might be helpful for less privileged individuals, a long-term solution should be developed, suggested, implemented, and disseminated not only at the NGOs level but also at the community and national levels.

Thus, a full-scale research study is needed to scrutinise the financial sustainability of education projects provided by NGOs in Kazakhstan. To understand how financial inequality might contribute to the political and socio-economic injustice in the sector, it should include a larger number of urban NGOs and an equal number of rural NGOs providing education programmes. This study did not cover the findings on cultural injustice of recognition that might be included in a further study. Finally, there are few research studies on NGOs with social enterprise structures. Developing further research might present good practices and opportunities for NGOs in Kazakhstan to address their sustainability issues.

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Index