

Development of Double-Diploma Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan: Problems and Perspectives

*Anar Bauyrzhanovna Ibrayeva, Zhanat Orynbekovna Kulzhabaeva
and Aray Shansharovna Rakisheva*

Kazakh Humanities and Law University, Astana, Kazakhstan

Abstract: The given article considers issues of realization double-diploma education in Kazakhstan. In particular, the authors review the aspects connected with the differences of legislative norms concerning Higher Education and of awarding academic degrees. Also the authors draw the reader's attention to the advantages of double-diploma education and usage of distance education technologies in realization of double-diploma programs. In the conclusion brief summary and suggestions are presented.

Key words: Bologna process • Higher education • Legislative norms • Distance education • Nostrification

INTRODUCTION

In the modern society, in the conditions of globalization education, as the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbaev stated, turned from “the category of national priorities into the category of world priorities” [1]. Kazakhstan defines the development of cooperation with other states and international organizations in the field of education and science as one of the most important spheres in its various activities. Thus, in 1997 Kazakhstan become one of the first 47 states ratifying the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, which automatically made Kazakhstan the participant of different international projects, programs and agreements [2] such as European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities (1953), European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications (1959), European Convention on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study (1990).

Entering to the world educational space gave an opportunity for graduates of the universities to get double-diploma education. Today the realization of this idea has become the new project for the Kazakhstan's education system. The academic mobility of students is provided on the basis of agreements between universities. Nowadays double-diploma education is being

implemented in more than 40 universities throughout Kazakhstan. Memoranda on realization of double-diploma education in more than 20 foreign universities have been signed [3].

Kazakhstan practices two types of double-diploma education: Double Major - the opportunity to study simultaneously on two different educational programs in order to achieve two equal diplomas and Major – Minor with possibility to get one major and one minor diploma [4].

In this article we tried to highlight the following aspects of double-diploma education: the advantages of double-diploma education, usage of distance technologies in realization of double-diploma education programs, problems regarding the differences in the legislative norms concerning Higher education and recognition of degrees in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Advantages of Double-Diploma Education: Already in their Prague Communiqué in 2001, ministers called for an increase in degree curricula offered in partnership by institutions from different countries and leading to a recognized joint degree in order to promote the European dimension of higher education [5]. In Kazakhstan educational programs are worked out by the corresponding structures of the universities on the basis of Agreement or Contract, where all the necessary terms and conditions are fixed, such as financing, selection of

students, contents of educational programs, periods of education, type and status of the documents awarded after the education etc.

The advantage of education on this scheme is obvious – a student gets two diplomas that have equal legal value in two countries. Undoubtedly, such approach contributes to the intergovernmental integration processes, broadens the graduate's employment opportunities, better his mobility, etc. Such programs, as a rule, are of a long-termed nature for all the participants. They can provide students with a chance of gaining additional academic and cultural experience abroad; and universities – with new opportunities for cooperation and enlarging its potential [6].

Usage of Distance Technologies in Realization of Double-diploma Education: Means and ways of transferring of study materials in the age of globalization and technological progress are the priority spheres in the development and strengthening of higher education system.

In our opinion, distance technologies are one of the key elements in the successful realization of double-diploma education program.

Degree programs via distance education offer a variety of benefits to faculty, students and school administrators. In an online environment, interaction between faculty and student increases as does the ability to reach a greater number of learners, resulting in increased diversification and globalization [7].

Other benefits include meeting the needs of non-traditional students, who typically have responsibilities like career and family which keep them from taking traditional daytime college courses and traditional students who may have a preference for learning in an online environment. Furthermore, as public colleges and universities experience decreasing financial state support, distance education provides a new audience and a new stream of revenue without the needs of additional on-campus facilities, such as residence halls and classroom space [8].

Nowadays in the world education space usage of distance technologies is one of the components of the educational services market. However, in Kazakhstan in the spheres of higher and post-graduate education such programs are not used in practice in double-diploma education. So, we think there is a clear need of active participation in the market of distance educational technologies within the program of double-diploma education for Kazakhstan universities. Technological

progress and experience of the world-level universities will contribute Kazakhstan universities to integrate in the world educational market and provide accessibility of distance higher education for its students.

In case of using distance technologies in the realization of double-diploma education program the growth of opportunities in the implementation of programs where the participation of experts and public figures whose experience could be vitally important in the integration process of higher education will be increased. Moreover, students, who have permanent work places, families and other factors preventing from studying in traditional way, will be able to have double-diploma education on equal basis with the other people.

Reducing the financing of universities from the state budget and the autonomy of universities will lead to the increased interest in the distance education; the issues of building additional campuses, financing of foreign colleagues residence and road expenses, personal attendance of professors, etc. will also be solved.

In its turn the situation of using distance technologies itself requires attention of universities administration. First and foremost this concerns the underequipped state of universities, low-speed internet connection, sometimes non-qualitative content of educational programs, etc.

Discrepancy in the Legislative Norms Concerning Higher Education Qualifications: Along with the advantages of double-diploma education there are a number of difficulties the universities and students meet with during the implementing double-diploma education programs in practice.

Today not all the countries have moved to the European education system and the ones that moved are still keeping their old systems. For instance, in 2011 Belorussia, Kazakhstan and Russian Federation signed Declaration of the Eurasian Economic Integration, one of direction of which is compatibility providing of education standards. [9]. Nowadays each country has its own legislative norms in education sphere and in some points they differ considerably. Thus, in Kazakhstan a three-level system of higher education is adopted: bachelor – master – philosophy doctor (PhD) [10]; in Russian Federation the degrees of “bachelor”, “specialist” and “master” are considered as high education degrees, after that a person has an option to enter to post-graduate studies (aspirantura or adjuncture) [11]; in Belorus higher education is divided into two levels including the awarding of specialist degree (level 1) and master degree

(level 2) [12]. Considering the fact that Belarus higher education does not include bachelor degree and the fact that universities in Russia and Belorussia continue to train specialists the thing that is not evident in Kazakhstan, on practice such programs lose their appeal for students.

To solve this problem, the following double-diploma trajectory of learning on the bachelor base with the peculiarities of legislative base both of Kazakhstan and Russia are functioning rather successfully:

- Specialitet in Russian university (5 years) and profile master degree (1 year+4 years of bachelor degree program) in Kazakhstan university;
- Doctorate with awarding an academic degree of PhD in Kazakhstan university (3 years) and post-graduate program (aspirantura) in Russian university (3 years);
- Research and teaching master degree in Kazakhstan university (2 years) and post-graduate program (aspirantura) in Russian universities, etc. [6].

Problems Related with the Recognition of Academic Degrees: Recognition has been at the heart of the Bologna Process since its inception and has received focused attention throughout the process. Ensuring fair recognition in practice as well as in theory is a sine qua non for the successful functioning of the European Higher Education Area [13].

“This reform has completely changed the content of higher education and has resulted in the new requirements to education process, curricula and syllabi, a new role of a student and a teacher, a new type of a lesson, assessment and evaluation process and others. Its aim is to sustain students’ and professors’ academic mobility, to make national programs and academic degrees recognized and acceptable in the international educational community.

The former system included the 5-year specialist diploma which led to post-graduate degrees, those of *Kandidat Nauk* (Candidate of Sciences) and *Doktor Nauk* (Doctor of Sciences). Due to the reforms, alongside with Bachelor’s programs new Master’s programs have been introduced. Since 2005 PhD programs have also been launched in the universities on an experiment basis. It should be mentioned that only 7 national universities are empowered this right.

At present there are 3 main levels of higher education in Kazakhstan: (a) the first level that provides fundamentals of a chosen field of study and leads to a Bachelor’s degree, (b) the second level that leads to a

Master’s degree and (c) the third level that leads to postgraduate degrees of PhD. They were legalized in a new Law on Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2007).

However, there is much misunderstanding between the former degrees inherited from the Soviet system: *Kandidat Nauk* (Candidate of Sciences) and *Doktor Nauk* (Doctor of Sciences) and the newly born, i.e. a Master’s and a PhD degree. Students and teachers who are actively participating in academic mobility and are looking for the qualification recognition sometimes face many problems.

For example, the degrees which existed in Kazakhstan before the reforms, as well as in other countries of the former Soviet Union, can not find the proper equivalents in the world educational community. Thus, a former 5-year diploma equals to a Master’s diploma in some countries as Sweden, but in other Scandinavian countries it equals only to a Bachelor’s diploma and in some countries it is not accepted as one of higher education.

A holder of a *Kandidat Nauk* degree (Candidate of Sciences) isn’t adequately treated in different countries. Some of them equal this degree to a Master’s degree, some equal it to a PhD. This situation of the discrepancy in national and international degrees and titles very often puts the Kazakhstani scholars in an unequal position with other scholars and restricts their mobility and employment in an international area. There is a hope that the RK Bologna membership could fill this degrees’ and titles’ gap and equal the former degrees with the internationally recognized.” [14].

From the other hand the issue with the recognition of the degrees as Candidate of Science and Doctor of Science is being appeared in Kazakhstan.

For comparison, the recognition of foreign state standard documents of education, academic degrees and academic statuses on the territory of the Russian Federation is realized on the basis of: 1997 Lisbon Convention, Law of Russian Federation Act “about Education” (article 28), Federal Law “about higher and post-graduate vocational education” (article 5 and article 23), Order of Ministry of education and science from 14.04.2009 №128 “about the order of recognition and establishing equivalence of foreign states qualifications about education in Russian Federation” and other legal norms.

In Kazakhstan the order of recognition and nostrification of documents about basic secondary, general secondary, technical and vocational post-secondary, higher and post-graduate education of

individuals gained degree abroad, in international or foreign educational institutions (or their branches) on the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan are defined by the Regulations on the recognition and nostrification of qualifications about education, set by the order of the ministry of education and science of Republic of Kazakhstan from January 10, 2008, N8. Meanwhile, the mentioned Regulations do not regulate the process of nostrification of documents on the academic degrees of candidates of science and doctors of science, PhDs and profile doctors. The recognition of academic degrees of candidate of science and doctor of science gained in the Commonwealth Independent States (CIS) countries (including the Russian Federation) to the residents of the Republic of Kazakhstan is carried out in accordance with the item 20-22 of the Order of Ministry of education and science of RK from March 31, 2011, N^o 127 “Approval of the Regulations for academic degrees awarding” (further hereinafter – the Regulations for academic degrees awarding). According to the Regulations for academic degrees awarding one of the requirements to be recognized as a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) or profile doctor for the citizens of Kazakhstan, foreigners and individuals without citizenship, gained degree abroad is to have the transcript which provides with the following information: the volume of studied disciplines and internships, final grades and grades for the final qualification papers, other components of the education process.

It is known that candidate of science and doctor of science diplomas given in the Commonwealth Independent States (including the Russian Federation) do not include any transcript. At the same time in Kazakhstan are not recognized Russian academic degrees awarded after finishing post-graduate studies in the result of research defend.

Besides, the Regulations for academic degrees awarding set that “application and documents, mentioned in item 22 of the given Regulations are considered by the Expert council which makes a decision on the recognition of academic degrees of doctor of philosophy (PhD), profile doctor, awarded abroad. The application is considered in 4 (four) months period from the moment of its submission to the Committee. In case of negative decision of the Expert council, the Committee refuses to award an academic degree” (items 23, 24).

The experts think that today the task of the issues of unification of education content and succession on levels of “international” standards or integrated educational programs of states concerned is rather topical. Only in

this case there is a chance to reach the maximum students mobility, there is an opportunity to continue studying in foreign universities or achieve higher qualifications of the following levels of education in accordance with gained degree[6].

It is obvious that in situation of integration processes within the Custom Union the procedure of recognizing the academic degrees qualifications awarded in CIS states should be simplified and requires the adoption of an appropriate international agreement. We suggest a mutual recognition of academic degrees awarded in the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan could be realized on the following scheme: candidate of science in the Russian Federation – doctor PhD in the Republic of Kazakhstan, doctor of science in the Russian Federation – profile doctor in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The rechecking of research quality on the basis of which the appropriate documents about academic degree are given by the authorized body must not be the prerogative of the Expert Council [15].

In the conditions of integration processes on the post-Soviet space the demand of scientist qualification, his/her scientific rate should be the basic guides in the development of education and science. The formal documents about recognition or not-recognition of academic degree diplomas given by authorized bodies of the appropriate states are only stopping the process of integration education and science between foreign states and Kazakhstan.

CONCLUSION

Due to today's highly competitive and unstable job market the educational process of young people is more important than ever. New possibilities to improve both qualifications and the level of education are needed. After the expansion of the European Union the process of exchange and studying abroad in EU countries has become much easier. This increased mobility of students has created a need to standardise the structure of higher education [16].

At the moment Kazakhstan is taking energetic measures to develop this sphere.

However, during the cooperation with foreign universities (in particular – with the CIS universities) the universities of Kazakhstan meet with some difficulties including the differences in qualifications concerning Higher education and recognition of diplomas and academic degrees. The given issue is especially topical among the states outside the Bologna process.

In its turn, Kazakhstan uses equivalent education trajectories on the basis of bachelor degree programs and practices nostrification of academic degrees for post-graduate education.

In the higher education reform of the Republic of Kazakhstan a special place should be given to the further development of distance technologies use in double-diploma education, which nowadays are not used widely in practice.

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