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EQUITY IN ACCESS TO KAZAKHSTANI HIGHER EDUCATION

Abstract. The purpose of this study, which is conducted using document analysis and primary data collection in order to understand the policy and problems of access and equity in Kazakhstani higher education in terms of financial issues. The absence of adequate financial support is the most major obstacle to accessing the education in Kazakhstan. At the same time higher education institutions are not allowed to raise funds and help students with decreasing the fees. In addition to inequity, the high-income cities of Almaty and Astana usually achieve the highest scores on the UNT. Thus means citizens from richer parts of Kazakhstan have more access to grants issued by government than poorer regions. The main answer of the question who pays and who should pay for higher education in Kazakhstan is revealed. The aim of this study, which is conducted using document analysis is to understand the policy and problems of access and equity in Kazakhstani higher education in terms of financial issues and unified national test (UNT) which is used to make access more transparent and fair. The absence of adequate financial support is the most major obstacle to accessing the education in Kazakhstan. At the same time higher education institutions are not allowed to raise funds and help students with decreasing the fees. In addition to inequity, the high-income cities of Almaty and Astana usually achieve the highest scores on the UNT. Thus means citizens from richer parts of Kazakhstan have more access to grants issued by government than poorer regions. Future researches may be divided by financing policies and access to higher education by UNT. Identification the affect of improved version of UNT on access and equity in higher education.

Key words: cost sharing analysis, higher education, financial issues, Kazakhstan.

Аңдатпа. Құжаттарды талдауды қолдану арқылы жүргізілген зерттеудің мақсаты - қаржылық жоғары оқу орындарында қолжетімділік пен теңдіктің саясаты мен мәселелерін түсіну, ол ашық және әділ қолжетімділікті қамтамасыз ету үшін қолданылатын Бірыңғай ұлттық тест (ҰБТ). Қаржылай қолдаудың жеткіліксіздігі - Қазақстандағы білімге қол жеткізудегі ең үлкен кедергі. Сонымен қатар жоғары оқу орындарына қаражат жинауға және студенттерге жәрдемақыны төмендетуге көмектесуге рұқсат берілмейді. Теңсіздіктен басқа, Алматы мен Астанадағы жоғары табысы жоғары қалалар, әдетте, ҰБТ бойынша ең жоғары көрсеткіштерге жетеді. Осылайша, Қазақстанның оралман аймақтарынан келген азаматтар кедей аймақтарға қарағанда мемлекеттік

гранттарға қол жеткізе алады. Болашақ зерттеулерді саяси қаржыландыру және ҰБТ-ға жоғары білім алу арқылы бөлуге болады. Жоғары білім берудің қолжетімділігі мен теңдігіне арналған ҰБТ нұсқасының әсерін анықтау.

Кілт сөздер: теңдік, қолжетімділік, жоғары білім, қаржылық мәселелер, Қазақстан.

Аннотация. Целью этого исследования, которое проводится с использованием анализа документов, является понимание политики и проблем доступа и справедливости в казахстанском высшем образовании с точки зрения финансовых вопросов и единого национального теста (ЕНТ), который используется для обеспечения более прозрачного и справедливого доступа. Отсутствие адекватной финансовой поддержки является самым серьезным препятствием для доступа к образованию в Казахстане. В то же время высшим учебным заведениям не разрешается привлекать средства и помогать студентам в снижении платы. Помимо неравенства, города Алматы с высоким уровнем доходов и Астаны обычно достигают наивысших показателей в ЕНТ. Таким образом, граждане из регионов-репатеро́в Казахстана имеют больший доступ к грантам, выданным правительством, чем более бедные регионы. Будущие исследования могут быть разделены путем финансирования политики и доступа к высшему образованию ЕНТ. Идентификация влияния улучшенной версии ЕНТ на доступ и справедливость в высшем образовании.

Ключевые слова: равенство, доступ, высшее образование, финансирование, Казахстан.

Introduction

“Everyone has the right to education... higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit”. These words are taken from 26th article of the Universal declaration of Human Rights, which demonstrates importance of equal access to higher education. The desire and capability to attend university are all you need to get a higher education in a “perfect” world, in which education is equally available to all citizens. However, more access does not always bring an increase in equity (Reisberg & Watson, 2011). In order to attain an equity today it is necessary to “address the underlying factors that determine who enrolls and who persists to graduation” (Reisberg & Watson, 2011).

According to OECD, there are two main features of equity, fairness and inclusion. No personal or social conditions (such as gender, ethnic origin or family background) should prevent education (OECD, 2012). All individuals have the right to acquire basic knowledge and most students should have an

opportunity to access high-level education (OECD, 2012). There are some principles which will ensure equity in higher education:

- Every individual who is able to study in a higher education institution should have an opportunity to do so.

- There should not be any discrimination on the basis of social class, gender, religion or ethnicity in the selection process for a place in higher education.

- Everyone should get same opportunities to develop and improve their skills (James, 2007).

These principles are interpreted in different ways and commonly used in governmental policies and strategies (James, 2007). They also can be taken as a measure of effectiveness of government work in the educational sphere (James, 2007). Numerous countries are creating different strategies for improving access to higher education (James, 2007). The educational systems considered as the best are those which combine equity and at the same situation right access to higher education taking into consideration students' qualitative outcomes (James, 2007). That is why different variations of governmental strategies and method first of all are based on effective and efficient financing of educational system, quality of knowledge offered and support provided to people looking for education (James, 2007).

Higher education gives individual skills and knowledge, that result in positive effects for the economy, on that individual's career and well-being, which will reduce the unemployment rate and increase standards of living (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). Higher education is also considered a good influence factor in various aspects of society, such as life satisfaction, social inequality, social cohesion, public safety and so on (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). Bringing equity to higher education is one of the most critical issues in current discussions. Surely there is positive role of higher education in social and economic life, nevertheless the methods and ways of distribution funds in these spheres have different influence and do not always consider in accessing the higher education (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015).

Methodology and data

Similar to most countries, Kazakhstani government faces problems with access and equity in higher education. Comparatively, Kazakhstan is a young country with a market economy, democratic governance, civil society and the rule of law. The context of education in Kazakhstan today is changed from the system provided under the former Soviet Union. The government of USSR provided free and equal access to education for every competent person in country (Sarinzhipov, 2013). The education system was fully controlled because of strict views and also was funded by Soviet Union (Sarinzhipov, 2013). Problems of equality, discrimination by gender, ethnicity, or income level did not exist since under the soviet ideology everybody was equal

(Sarinzhipov, 2013). Affordability was not a problem because higher education was free for all ((Sarinzhipov, 2013). This system had benefits for children of working class families, children from rural areas and children from certain ethnic groups (Heyneman, 2010). Nevertheless, higher education was in the hands of institutions, which could control admission of students through their own entrance examinations, which were obscure and usually inequitable (Heyneman, 2010). Therefore, document analysis methodology was chosen to investigate the surface of problems which were showed previously.

Literature review

After the collapse of USSR, the Kazakhstani government needed policies to regulate the education system, therefore “Law of education” was created on the base of previous management experience in order to take control of all educational institutions (Heyneman, 2010). From the years following independence up until now different amounts of money have been given to universities in form of grants to create financial accessibility of higher education (Heyneman, 2010). This amount of money is not sufficient to create equal rights to higher education and accessibility (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2013).

Participation rates in higher education. During the years of transition new opportunities have appeared in Kazakhstani higher educational sphere, because of the growing desire to increase the number of available places in higher educational institutions (Heyneman, 2010). Very soon, improving the access to higher education became an important mission for government (Heyneman, 2010). By Constitution of Kazakhstan, every citizen of our state has the right to get free higher education on a competitive basis in public universities. As well private institutions are also regulated by the Constitution. Thus because of increasing rapid demand for higher education, the higher education institutions have expanded, mostly in the form of private provision (Heyneman, 2010). In Kazakhstan, enrolment in higher education between 1999 and 2005 has doubled and the proportion of tuition-fee places in higher education has decreased (Narenova, 2006). The discussion on equity in this paper is focused on the policies that are needed to ensure that education services are made available to all, regardless of economic or social status, location or other needs.

Table 1 shows the rapid increase in enrolment rates which have resulted in gross participation rates of 44.3% among 19-to-24-year-old population demonstrating evidence of high access to higher education. A deeper investigation of Table 1 also shows that full time gross participation rose from 14.6% in 2000 to 20.8% in 2005. During the same period, full time participation in private education grew from 2.9% to 7.5% in 2005. Participation in distance education grew from 8.8% of the age cohort in 2000 to 23.3% in 2005, an increase of 187.5%. The greatest increase was enrolment in private distance education, which grew from 47.4 thousand students in 2000 to

216.2 thousand in 2005, an increase of 456.1%. Fifty-three per cent of all student's study part time.

These participation rates show good indicators of accessibility and according to the OECD average of 53% for high income countries (OECD, 2012). As the data shows, Kazakhstan has made significant progress in increasing and expanding participation since 1996. Two policies have improved access to higher education for the less well off and for those from rural areas. The development of new procedures for admission to tertiary education (the Unified National Test or UNT) and the introduction of a series of financial measures to assist students with the costs of their education.

Table 1

Number of students in the higher education system in Kazakhstan, 1999-2005 (in thousands)

	1999-00		2000-01		2001-02		2002-03		2004-05	
	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%
Total number of students	365.4	100.0	440.7	100.0	514.7	100.0	597.5	100.0	744.2	100.0
Full-time	226.2	61.9	254.5	63.5	288.2	56.0	300.3	50.3	349.6	47.0
Evening	2.8	0.8	2.1	0.48	1.9	0.37	1.8	0.3	2.3	0.3
Distance	136.4	37.3	184.1	41.8	224.6	43.6	295.4	49.4	392.2	52.7
Total number of students in private HEIs	94.4	25.8	126.9	28.8	182.5	35.5	256.0	42.9	344.2	46.3
Full-time	45.2	12.4	55.6	12.6	79.8	15.5	109.2	18.3	125.9	16.9
Evening	1.8	0.5	1.5	0.4	1.5	1.5	1.7	0.3	2.2	0.3
Distance	47.4	12.9	69.8	15.8	101.2	19.7	146.1	24.5	216.2	29.1

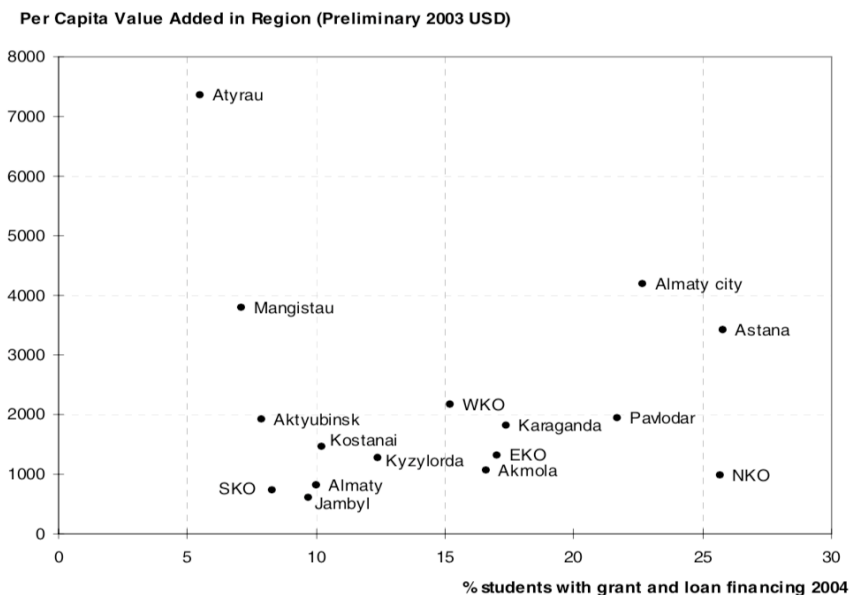
Source : Narenova, M., (2006). Unpublished background report and presentation prepared for the review team. TransMONEE 2006 database, UNICEF IRC, Florence.(Narenova, 2006)

Equity in distribution grants in higher education. Admission to higher education, formerly the responsibility of HEIs, is now based on the results of the UNT, which was introduced at the national level in 2003/4. The UNT is an attempt to implement a corruption-free, transparent admission procedure(OECD, 2012).According to OECD recommendations UNT should be improved and developed in order to increase equity in students enrollement(OECD, 2016).Kazakhstan has introduced public educational grants which provide selected students with access to the institution of their choice. By 2006, 32 500 public educational grants were awarded, 60% to Kazakh-speaking students and the remaining 40% to Russian speakers (Damitov, 2006).These grants are awarded by the Ministry of Education and Science by state orders to winners of “Altyn Belgi” medals, to Olympiad winners and, on a competitive basis, and based on state orders for specific

disciplines and languages, to students who have passed the UNT with the minimum score (Damitov, 2006). The potential implications of rising UNT pass rates for rural students to access grants are discussed below (Damitov, 2006). Quotas have been established for awards of public education grants in this way – 30% of the state order to rural students for priority social, economic disciplines; 2% to Kazakh ethnic nationalities who are not citizens of Kazakhstan; 0,5% to disabled children; 1% to orphans and children without parental support (Damitov, 2006).

As-mentioned above there is a link between the financial status of a region and UNT scores. Therefore, Kazakhstani government should deeply investigate socio-economic status of applicant and make informed decisions about right financing in education area. Actually, Kazakhstan has difficulties obtaining reliable information about social-economic status of citizens and one of the most significant reasons of this problem is widespread “grey” economy. Thus, authentic data about the income levels of the population can not be defined. Data from the Ministry of Education and Science (based on a survey of higher education institutions, to which 80 institutions replied) shows us that almost two-thirds of "students from poor families" study without any financial support. A study by the National Center for Educational Statistics and Evaluation (NCESE, 2014) shows that UNT scores are related to the regions where students are located: on regions with high numbers of people living in lower standards of living, the UNT scores were considerably lower. By comparison, the high-income cities of Almaty and Astana usually achieve the highest scores on the UNT (NCESE, 2014).

Graph 1 - Regional value added per capita and grant financing



Source: Damitov, B.K. (2006). National Report on the Status and Development of Education. National Centre for Educational Quality Assessment, Astana.(Damitov, 2006).

Even if there is not enough reliable information about socio-economic status of students, it is surely obvious that there is an interconnection with the geographic location of students, their SES and their academic performance. Rural students in Kazakhstan are more likely to be of low SES status and to perform less well on the UNT. This unequal competition for state grants have a negative effect on the completion of studies by these students, because rural and urban students do not receive totally fair consideration or do not receive totally fair consideration or appreciation.

Financial accessibility of higher education. The financial inequity can also be seen in economic statement of population. According to employment data, about 44% of Kazakhstan's workers are classified as low income, with 43% in the middle income bracket and 10 to 13% in the high income bracket. About 84% of students currently pay tuition fees for higher education. Access to higher education for less wealthy people who are unable to qualify for a government grant is a big issue (OECD, 2016). A national survey found that 59.8% of high school leavers from poor families have no opportunity to continue education, 76% citing lack of money as the main reason (OECD, 2016).

The absence of adequate financial support is the most major obstacle to accessing the education in Kazakhstan. State grants and scholarships are provided only for one-quarter of higher education students (NCESE, 2014). There is a voucher-type system of grants in Kazakhstan. This means, state funds for higher education places are allocated to the student, rather than to the higher education institution (NCESE, 2014). And most students use private funds to access higher education. As we can see in figure 2 about 73% of Kazakhstan's higher education students funded their places in higher education institutions using their own family funds.

The rate of tuition is increasing much faster than the income levels of citizens (NUGSE, 2014). All institutions have to guarantee that the tuition levels do not fall below the state education grant (NUGSE, 2014). Therefore, the government cannot increase public funding of higher education without raising the tuition payments for those who pay for education. Minimum grant/tuition funds levels are set on by government, and change by institutions and disciplines (NUGSE, 2014). Typical tuition levels at public institutions range from roughly KZT 300k to KZT 700k or roughly USD 900 to USD 2 000 at mid-2016 conversion rates and the private institutions usually charge several times more than that (NUGSE, 2014). Free higher education is available on a competitive basis only and educational grants give students a chance to access the institution of their choice. Mostly, the grants are

distributed among state education institutions. The state can regulate the number of specialists that are needed the most through managing the number state grants' or particular specialities and institutions (Government of Republic Kazakhstan, 2009). Thus in certain fields, such as law, as few as one in ten bachelor-level students studies on a state grant (Government of Republic Kazakhstan, 2009). In other fields, such as engineering and technology, roughly six in ten students hold a grant and in agricultural sciences, as many as eight in ten do (JSC Information-Analytic Center, 2015).

Along with usual state grants government implemented grant set-asides which have been introduced for students from a range of backgrounds: rural students, those in priority social and economic disciplines, Kazakh ethnic minorities, Kazakhs who are citizens of another country, students with a disability and orphans and children without parental support (Government of Republic Kazakhstan, 2009). In the case of equal scores on the UNT, orphans and children who need support are given preferential treatment (Government of Republic Kazakhstan, 2009). Other grants and discounts in many higher education institutions have introduced their own discounts for various groups of students. Fees may be reduced by between 15% and 50% for high-achieving students, elite athletes, students with dependents, and where two or more students come from the same family (JSC Information-Analytic Center, 2015). Data provided by the JSC Information-Analytic Center in May 2016 suggest that nearly one in twelve students may be in receipt of such discounts with students from poor families somewhat more likely to receive them. Employers provide grant funding for students with these grants more common in the fields of engineering and technology (JSC Information-Analytic Center, 2015). Higher education institutions themselves currently have only limited opportunities to raise revenue and to use this to offer additional financial support to students in need because of lack of authority. Kazakhstan's highly centralised financial regulations do not allow higher education institutions to establish endowments which have proven to be an effective approach for funding targeted initiatives in a number of countries (Griffith University, 2010). The restrictions in Kazakhstan limit higher education institutions' ability to access philanthropy and to develop active partnerships with industry that could support disadvantaged students.

Before Kazakhstani government will solve the problem of authority of higher education institutions some additional ways of financial support were introduced and are still in place today. Unfortunately, financial aid schemes are very limited in scope, volume and impact. The introduction of a student loans scheme in 2005 has failed to gain real traction. Only 6 000 students have taken up the loan option in the ten years since its introduction (NUGSE, 2014). Educational loans are provided by second-level banks and the loan principal is guaranteed by the JSC Financial Center of the Republic of Kazakhstan (JSC Information-Analytic Center, 2015). The public student loan system is still

tainted by a policy initiative in the 1990s which had the state directly provide loans to students (NUGSE, 2014). This programme had extremely high default rates; the bad debts are still being actively collected (NUGSE, 2014). Those who are approved for a state-guaranteed loan still need co-signers. It was reported to the OECD review team that a significant percentage of "guaranteed" borrowers do not in the end receive loans. Sometimes the bank breaks off contact with the borrower, and sometimes a co-signer cannot be found. It was also reported to the review team that the typical credit recourse of students who need to borrow is to private loan markets, where interest rates may be upwards of 25% (NUGSE, 2014).

The Finance Center of the Ministry of Education and Science reported to the OECD review that, since the inception of the State Educational Accumulation Scheme (SEAS) in 2012, only 11 000 people have created deposits under the scheme — a figure which is far below the 500 000 depositors predicted at the programme's outset. Kazakhstanis' uncertainties about the economy (given rising inflation and the risk of further currency devaluation) reduce the appeal of a savings vehicle denominated in tenge. There is also a cultural bias implicit in this scheme: it will be more attractive to those families who have the financial capacity to save and a predisposition towards doing so and it will thus use public funds to encourage behaviour that may well have happened anyway. However, it will be less attractive for lower SES households both because they often lack funds to save and because they are less likely to aspire to higher education for their children. Yet it is precisely these families that stand to benefit the most from an effective targeted allocation of incremental public funding. To promote lifelong learning government has created motivation schemes for employers to provide support for employees who want to study in higher education institutions (NUGSE, 2014). As reported by faculty and employer groups to whom the OECD review team spoke, there appears to be either a lack of trust between institutions and employers or a lack of understanding of each other's perspectives (OECD, 2012). In developed countries such as the United States and Australia, for instance, there are a range of emerging partnerships in which universities work with employers to develop specialised qualifications for staff. For example, IBM has partnered with 28 universities and business schools to develop a curriculum on big data. In Australia, the financial services firm AMP and Griffith University have collaborated to create university-industry postgraduate degrees that combine theoretical coursework with experience as a financial adviser (Griffith University, 2010).

Results and discussion

Sometimes, barriers to higher education arises from students' limited financial resources. Growing up in a family where parents have low levels of education often means having less financial support available for studies. In addition some young adults may have to enter the labour market early in order

to support themselves and their families. Thus if the education system does not support students from disadvantaged backgrounds more challenges for government occur. According to the State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2010-2020) (Government of Republic Kazakhstan, 2009) adopted by the government developed countries spend about 3 percent of GDP for higher education while Kazakhstan spends 1,5 percent of GDP. If Kazakhstan spends two times less than developed countries, government should not wait for results which would be the same.

However, the resolution of this problem is not necessarily "free tuition for all", as that approach can lead to inefficient use of public funds. This option may help those who cannot afford higher education, but also those who can. Instead, decreasing prices to a moderate level of tuition fees would give opportunities to lower-income students and private returns acquired from studying in higher education system, at the same time increase access to higher education and at least save public resources. For instance, Gale and Parker (2013) found that Australian students from certain target groups (particularly low SES students) appear to benefit from three forms of financial support: support to repay tuition fees, such as loan repayment schemes, income support while studying at university and funding schemes to the specific needs of target groups (Gale & Parker, 2013).

Conclusion

Kazakhstani government could use one approach which is embodied in financial aid systems that combine means-tested grants with loans whose later repayment levels are directly related to graduate's income. Australia and New Zealand have used this approach to soften the impact of high tuition fees, encourage disadvantaged students to enter higher education and reduce the risks of high student loan debt. There are numerous ways to increase access and improve equity related to higher education. Kazakhstani government should make a comprehensive commitment to explore the best options for improvement

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