

DEVELOPMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION CURRICULUM OF KAZAKHSTAN IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY REFORMS

K.Kurakbayev^{1*}, D.Bridges², A.Iztayeva¹, A.Omarbekova¹

1) Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education, Astana, Kazakhstan; *kkurakbayev@nu.edu.kz; 2) University of Cambridge, UK

Introduction. The purpose of the research is to examine the impact of recent educational innovations on the contemporary secondary education in Kazakhstan. Applying change management as a theoretical framework of the study [1], we firstly explore the role that innovations play in education and changes and in the recent reforms brought into the system. Secondly, we explore challenges and opportunities of adapting innovations in mainstream secondary schools' curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and management to ensure quality education [2]. And finally, we examine the school capacity in the process of implementing new knowledge and practice in the context of contemporary changes and innovations [3].

The data presented in this abstract emerged from the third year of a collaborative research project between three institutions: the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education and Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS). The research project in 2012–13 revealed a number of important areas for this current study. The 2014 project has six strands: the role of school leaders (directors) and teachers in educational reform; teachers' identity; the "translation" of new curriculum and assessment from NIS to mainstream schools; school assessment; school autonomy; and the transition from school to university.

Methods. The mixed research methodology exploited in the study involved: documentary and policy documents analysis, comparative analysis of world practices; individual and group interviews; focus-groups discussions and attitudinal surveys. Field research involved on-going collaboration with school leaders, teachers, students, parents, local administrators and national policy makers.

Results and discussion. The preliminary results suggest that the secondary system deals with many reform initiatives at once and the schools find it challenging to deal with them due to their low level capacity. The roots of problems often have structural and systemic traits. On the other side, there is some evidence that changes are strategically essential and in demand. One of those is the development of teachers to enhance their professional autonomy and thereby, increase the effect of innovations.

Conclusions. Following points derived from our research include: 1) the importance of school leaders for the success of innovation in schools - but also their lack of preparation for this role; 2) the potential for local creativity in educational reform - but also the lack of encouragement and space for such creativity; 3) the overwhelmingly negative impact of the current form of Unified National Testing on attempts to introduce "21st century skills" and progressive approaches to teaching into the classroom; 4) the lack of centralised coordination of the different elements of educational reform (e.g. in introducing tri-lingual education into experimental schools) and hence the impossible burden of responsibility placed on schools; 5) the obstructive nature of the current "stavka" system to attempts to develop a more collaborative and responsible approach to change among teachers; 6) lack of capacity of the mainstream pre-service teacher education system to prepare new teachers for changes in curriculum and pedagogy; 7) Strong need for the higher education system to develop a planned response to the 12-year schooling.

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