



Teacher Education Reforms in Kazakhstan: Trends and Issues

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journal or publication title	Bulletin of Institute of Education, University of Tsukuba
volume	42
number	2
page range	87-97
year	2018-03
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2241/00151888

〈研究論文〉

Teacher Education Reforms in Kazakhstan: Trends and Issues

Kuanysh TASTANBEKOVA

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1. Introduction

Kazakhstan is one of the fifteen post-soviet republics that gained independence following the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. In the dawn of independence there existed and was functioning solid education system with wide net of facilities and teaching personnel covering all stages - early childhood and pre-school education, primary and secondary general education, secondary professional training and tertiary education. It was well-developed and centralized system that was established under the soviet rule and faced challenges of political, economic and social transformations after the dismiss of Soviet Union. Education reformation process that have been implemented since then in Kazakhstan can be divided into three stages. First stage (1991–2000) was a period led by the rhetoric of international donors and focused mainly on reduction of public education expenditure. Second stage (2001–2010) focused on integration of Kazakhstan’s education into so-called “international educational space”, by introducing standardized assessment mechanisms and restructuring higher education system in requirements of joining European Higher Education Area (Bologna process). And finally, reforms of ongoing decade have been implemented under the slogan of developing Kazakhstan’s original way of educational innovation (2011-present).

The success of these reforms largely depends on existence of highly qualified teachers. However, teacher education was rarely prioritized in the reforms of the first and second stage, when mainly restructuring of secondary, post-secondary and higher education systems was carried out. It has been gaining more attention in recent years when introduction of progressive teaching and learning methods were declared. Significant funds have been funneled particularly into reforms of in-service teacher training. At the same time new subjects were added to university curriculum of pre-service teacher education programs.

Purpose of this paper is to overview education policies and indicate recent trends and issues of teacher education reforms in Kazakhstan through the analysis of the education legislature and related statistics. In the following parts I will first outline major education policies with stress on economic background. Further I will specify changes that have been implemented in pre-service teacher education and in-service training system since 2011. And finally I will indicate trends of these reforms and discuss issues that they cause.

2. Major education policies: rationalization, integration and modernization

Stage 1, 1991–2000

In the first years after independence Kazakhstan’s government has taken for granted high literacy rate, fee-free education at all levels, nearly universal school participation, well-qualified teachers inherited from soviet past. At the same time in the pursuit of integration into international society as in independent state this heritage was criticized to be ideologically dogmatic by content, over-centralized and obsolete by structure, and,

consequently, not internationally competitive. In the condition of sharp economic decline new reforms to promote fast and significant changes of education system were developed with assistance of many international donor organizations. These recommendations were based on the neoliberal principles of market economy and stressed decentralization and liberalization of education as most important issues. Silova and Steiner-Khamsi (2008) call these reforms “post-socialist education reforms package” and situate them in the trend of “policy borrowing and lending” practice that have been utilized as international development assistance in many developing countries around the world. In Kazakhstan, Asian Development Bank took the leading role and recommended government to reduce public expenditure on education (Asanova, 2006, p.657).

Major education policies of the first decade after independence were declared in the “State Program of Education Reformation and Development” that was adopted by Government Resolution No. 56 on 12th of January, 1996. They focused on reduction of public expenditure and increase of private spending on education, decentralization of education finance and governance, rationalization of school teaching staff and reorganization of schools. As a result, percentage of GDP expenditure on education decreased from 4.1% in 1995 to 3.2% in 2000 (see Fig.1). This led to deterioration of many aspects of education system. For example, 335 rural schools in 1997 alone were shut down and left 26,900 eligible children out of education (Asanova, 2006, p.660). Practice of regular maintenance of school buildings and equipment had stopped due to lack of financing from local budgets, leading to aging of school facilities. Teachers often left the profession due to salary reduction and pay pauses, which caused significant devaluation of teachers’ profession and social status (Silova, 2009). Monthly salary in education sphere is still lower than average across the country which keeps teaching profession amongst least popular (see Fig.2).

Reforms of teacher education at this period are characterized by two trends. First one is the opening pre-service teacher education courses in private universities which establishment was admitted in 1993. Second is an integration of pre-service teacher training institutes with other higher vocational training institutes (e.g. agrarian, engineering, arts) and their reorganization into universities⁽¹⁾. In-service teacher training was left almost untouched during this decade and continued functioning in the soviet style (Mukhitova, 2004).

Stage 2, 2000–2010

Second stage of education reforms was synchronized with rapid economic grow due to high prices on export commodities. The major education policy of the first five years was stated in “State Program of Education” (here and after state programs will be abbreviated as SPED) that was adopted by President’s Decree No.448 on 30th of September 2000. Improvement of education quality and modernization of school facilities were prioritized. In 2004 new standardized assessment system, Unified National Test (combination of final attestation of secondary education and entrance exam to universities) was introduced. Reforms of the second half of this decade were carried out according to the “SPED for 2005–2010” (adopted by President’s Decree No.1459 on 11th of October 2004). This policy paper indicated enhancement of the number of pre-school education facilities, extension of general compulsory education from 11 to 12 years, restructuring of higher education in accordance with requirements of Bologna Process which has completed in 2010. All these tasks were set up to achieve “integration into international education space”. Yet government expenditure on education remained low. In fact, in 2005 it dropped to the lowest level of 2% of GDP (see Fig.1). Thus, reforms that required big financial expenses, like extension of secondary general education, have stagnated. Shift to 12 years secondary education has started from 2016–2017 school year. All children who have been enrolled in the first grade of primary school are supposed to study 12 years.

Teacher education reforms of this period are characterized by reorganization of pre-service teacher education curriculum with purpose to shorten it from five years of study to four due to shift from one level five years higher vocational training to two level six years higher education 4+2 (bachelor + master course). This led to the reduction of specific courses like “Pre-school pedagogy” and “Theory and practice of teaching the subject” as well as to decrease of school-based teaching practicum hours (Saitimova, 2008).

Stage 3, 2011- present

Third stage of reforms is a period of radical changes and fostering original way of education reformation. In the beginning the whole picture of reforms was envisioned in the “SPED for 2011–2020” (adopted by President’s Decree No.1118 on 10th of December 2010). This program document came up amidst “PISA shock” after announcement of Kazakhstan’s poor performance in PISA 2009 with 390 points in reading (103 point lower than OECD average), 405 points in math (91 point lower than OECD average) and 400 points in science (101 point lower than OECD average). Such poor results have shocked Kazakh government because in TIMSS 2007 Kazakhstan’s 4-graders scored considerably good results with 549 points in math and 533 points in science (5th place in math and 11th place in science among 36 participant countries). As a reaction to the “PISA shock” state program declared completion of shift to 12 years general compulsory education, introduction of per capita education financing. But the originality of the reforms of this stage is marked by establishment of 20 secondary education schools for gifted children, and new university with focus on innovative education and research, all named after first and lifetime president Nursultan Nazarbayev. Three languages of instruction – Kazakh, Russian and English – are adopted in these 20 Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS). State program declared that best practices from NIS will be disseminated to all secondary schools across the country. These schools are fully equipped with the best educational facilities and strictly selected teachers, one third of whom are foreigners. NIS are aimed to incorporate international best practice in teaching, curriculum design and assessment (Shamshididina, et al, 2014). Curriculum of these schools was developed in partnership with Cambridge International Examinations. Furthermore, Cambridge University Faculty of Education supervised teacher training with further enhanced role in design and realization of three level (“cascade model”) of in-service teacher training courses that will be discussed later.

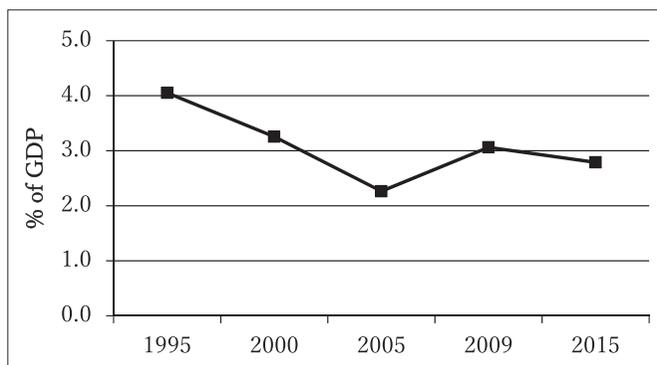
Although Kazakhstan’s performance in PISA 2012 has shown improvement, the gap between Kazakhstan and the OECD average is equivalent to more than 1.5 years of schooling in math and science and 2.5 years in reading (Inoue and Gortazar, 2014). OECD “Review of National Policies for Education. Secondary Education in Kazakhstan” (2014) recommends “to declare its commitment to the principle that all students in Kazakhstan, whatever their background, are capable of achieving high standards and need to do so; and should make it a top national priority to tackle the long tail of educational under-achievement revealed in PISA. This will involve developing plans and programmes to ensure that students at risk of under-achievement are identified early, and that schools and teachers take effective steps to get them back on track. Under-achievers in less favoured schools deserve (and need) good teachers and good-quality resources as well, and the authorities should ensure that they can get them” (OECD, 2014, p.350).

In response to that kind of recommendations from OECD, Kazakhstan’s government launched new stage of reforms in 2016 by adopting “SPED for 2016–2019” (President’s Decree No.205, 1st of March 2016). Full achievement of equal access to quality pre-school and secondary education was declared as priority goal of the program. Modernization of educational infrastructure, renovation of educational contents and improvement of management and monitoring of education system were stressed as important issues that should be worked on.

And for the first time in the record of state programs quality improvement of teaching personnel and the enhancement of teacher’s professional prestige were stated as essential task in achievement of this goal. Another goal is to introduce new education contents and teaching methods that have been practiced and approved in NIS to all schools across the country. It means also transition to trilingual instruction in Kazakh, Russian and English languages. After the launch of the program Ministry of Education and Science announced the plan of realization of this shift⁽²⁾. According to this plan, from 2016–2017 school year two hours of English as foreign language will be added to the curriculum of 1st grade of primary education, from 2018–2019 subjects like “History of Kazakhstan” and “Kazakh language and literature” will to be taught in Kazakh in schools with non-Kazakh language of instruction, and subjects like “World history” and “Russian language and literature” will be taught in Russian in non-Russian language schools, from 2019–2020 subjects like “Chemistry”, “Biology”, “Information technologies” and “Physics” will be taught in English in all schools⁽³⁾. As it was mentioned above, teachers who are supposed to teach in three languages have been prepared through the new system of in-service training called “cascade model” since 2011. I will specify trends of this teacher education reform in next section.

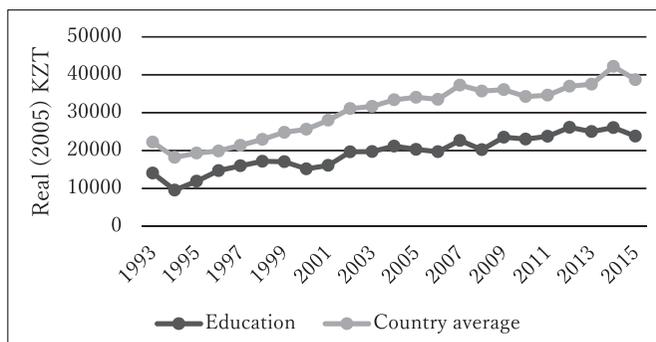
Meanwhile, public expenditure on education as proportion of GDP has not increased significantly. As we continuously can see from Figure 1, it has recovered from lowest index of 2.2% in 2005 to 3.2% in 2009, but declined again to 2.8% in 2015. Thus, dependence on international donor assistance remains significant. In 2010 Kazakhstan’s government has borrowed \$29 million from World Bank for modernization of technical and vocational education, main purpose of which is renewal of educational standards and qualifications of secondary vocational and tertiary education (World Bank, 2010). In August 2017 another World Bank loan of \$67 million in total was received for modernization of secondary education (World Bank, 2017). The latter one is fully oriented on the implementation of the reforms declared in the “SPED for 2016–2019”.

Figure 1.
Government expenditure on education, total
(% of GDP)



Source: World Bank Database Education Statistics
<http://datatopics.worldbank.org/education/country/kazakhstan>

Figure 2.
Average salary in education
(in local currency, KZT)



Source: Author's calculations based on the annual data of State Committee of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan
www.stat.gov.kz

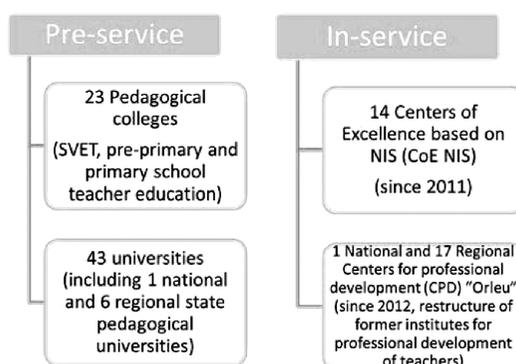
3. Teacher education reforms: English medium instruction and cascade model

Teacher education system of Kazakhstan is represented by pre-service education organizations of two levels (secondary vocational education and higher education) and in-service training institutes (see Table 1).

Pre-service teacher education at secondary vocational education and training (SVET) level is provided in 23 pedagogical colleges that prepare teachers for pre-primary education, including early childhood education and care, primary education and teachers for subjects like “Physical training”, “Art and design”, “Home technology”. Pre-service teacher education at higher education level is provided by 43 universities including one national and six state pedagogical universities and prepare teachers for all levels of education. In Kazakhstan pre-service teacher education organizations provide pedagogical qualification in combination with the diploma that proves graduation from college or university. Teachers who have only college level education are encouraged to continue education at university to obtain diploma from institution of higher education.

Reforms of pre-service teacher education were mainly oriented to university level. As it was mentioned earlier in this paper, during the first stage of reforms (1991–2000) soviet style teacher training institutes were

Table 1.
Teacher Education System in Kazakhstan



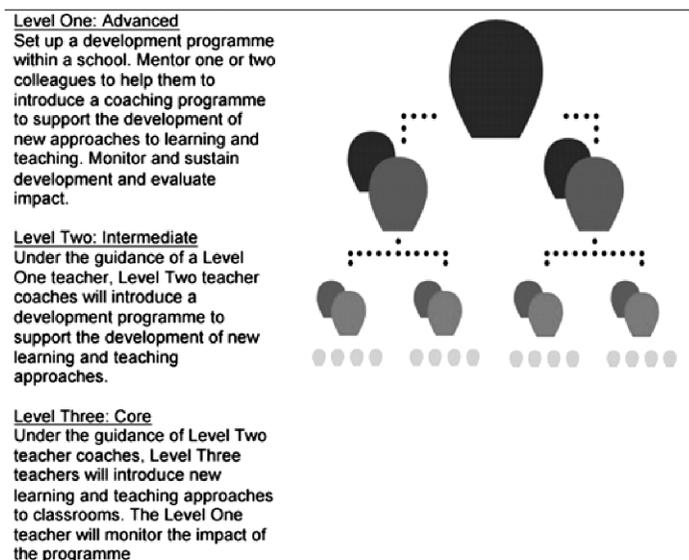
Source: Author's design based on the official statistics

incorporated in universities on the one hand, and private universities were allowed to open teacher training courses on the other. This reform led to deterioration of quality of teacher training due to lack of teaching corpus (many professors either were fired during the process of optimization of faculty or left job due to low salary), poor condition of facilities and equipment, decrease of teaching practicum at schools (Akhmetova, 2002, p.211). Reforms of second stage (2001–2010) were focused on restructuring one level five years higher vocational training into two level six years (undergraduate and graduate, 4+2) university degree (bachelor and master) system. For pre-service teacher education this reform meant reduction of specific courses related to theory and practice of pedagogy and psychology that were considered as essential part of educating highly qualified teacher (Akhmetova, *ibid*, p.212).

Third stage of reforms in pre-service teacher education is characterized by introduction of new subjects to the curriculum. These subjects are “Professional Kazakh language”, “Professional Russian language” and “Professionally oriented foreign (English) language”. Their introduction was assigned by «State standard of higher education” that was adopted by Government Decree No.1080 on 23rd of August 2012. Its purpose is to prepare trilingual teachers in accordance with “SPED for 2011–2020”.

Since “SPED for 2011–2020” has declared dissemination of the best practices from NIS to all secondary schools across the country in-service teacher training has become main target of teacher education reforms since 2011. In May 2011, 14 Centers of Excellence (CoE) were established under the auspices of NIS. In August 2011 Cambridge University Faculty of Education and Cambridge International Examinations was commissioned by the government of Kazakhstan to design a program of teachers’ professional development and trainer accreditation process (Turner et.al, 2014, p.83). From January of 2012 CoE have started realization of three-level in-service teacher training. The structure and principle of this training is given in Table 2. According to the authors of this program, so called “cascade model” of professional development was adopted to “reach as

Table 2.
New in-service teacher training: cascade model



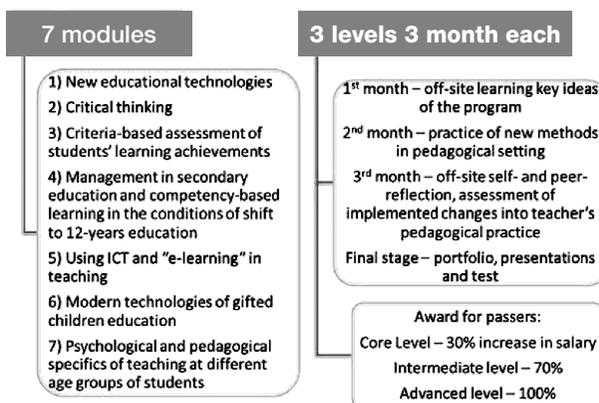
Source: Wilson, E., Turner, F., Sharimova, A. & Brownhill, S. (2013) “Reform at Scale: Teacher Development in Kazakhstan”

many teachers as possible in shortest time scale” (Turner et.al., *ibid*, p.84). But the capacity of 14 CoE was not enough to reach all of more than 300,000 school teachers of Kazakhstan. That is why by Government Resolution No.232 from 12th of February 2012, 17 regional institutes of in-service teacher training and reeducation were reorganized in the Centers for professional development “Orleu” (which means in Kazakh “climbing the mountain”). Before this reorganization major function of these 17 regional institutes was provision of professional development programs for teachers who must take 2-week courses for attestation of their professional qualification every five years. Since 2012 it has shifted to provision of level 3 and level 2 of the program.

The contents and timeline of this new three-level program and financial incentives for finishing each level are shown in the Table 3. Initially it was planned that 70,000 teachers annually will go through the program and was expected that by the beginning of 2016–2017 school year all teachers (325,184 in 2016) will finish either level. However, according to the official statistics of the Ministry of Education and Science in 5 years from 2012 only 52,500 teachers could achieve that. It should be noted that although the program is free of charge, all travel and living expenses during the period of off-site study are covered by attending teachers. Financial incentives are promised and should be paid from the local budget, but in practice due to gap between urban and rural areas payment can be delayed or even cancelled. Hence, due to inability to achieve goals of the initial plan, CPD “Orleu” have started 3-weeks intensive courses to prepare teachers for introduction of new educational content since May 2016.

Reorganization of in-service teacher training and reeducation institutes and implementation of new model of teacher training have significantly challenged these organizations. Faculty members of institutes are required to excellently understand the contents of new program and be able to involve teachers into the new practice of professional development. To do so they have to complete the program by themselves first. However, in difference with school teachers they are not provided with financial incentives on the one hand, and are very limited in time on the other. Thus, the fact that both providers and receivers of new in-service teacher training program are not fully motivated should not be left unnoticed.

Table 3.
Contents and structure of new in-service teacher training program



Source: Authors design based on the information from the webpage of CPD “Orleu” www.orleu-edu.kz

4. Conclusion. Trends and issues of teacher education reform

In this paper I have examined major education policies with focus on teacher education reforms in Kazakhstan. There are two trends of reforms that simultaneously cause the issues. First is the rapid speed of the reforms initiation and emphasis on the quantity over quality in the process of implementation. All reforms that were examined in this paper cover 3–5 years. Delay and stagnation in realization process come from insufficient preparation for the implementation. Second trend is elitist orientation of the reforms. It was designed to be implemented in and for the purposes of the fully equipped school for gifted children, but intends to disseminate the practice to all secondary schools, 76.7% of which are rural schools where study 48% of all school children. On top of that, 44% of all schools are small graded schools with poor material and technical equipment and shortage of teachers. Explicit difference in the work conditions and salary gap between NIS and rural teachers also rather intensifies difficulties in the sustainable capacity building. Elitism of the reforms lays behind the low motivation of teachers for professional development. Finally, it should be noted that little attention to the improvement of pre-service teacher education in combination with absence of strict mechanism of candidates' selection will further worsen quality of future teachers.

Notes

- (1) During Soviet time higher education was represented as a system of vocational training of highly qualified specialists and was provided by organizations of higher education called “institutes”. Scientific research was separated from higher education in the organizations called “Academy of Science”. Higher education organizations called “universities” existed only in very limited number and meant rather combination of various areas of vocational training under one roof. After dissolution of USSR, with the shift from centralized planned economy to liberal market economy higher education in post-soviet republics went through transformations that were characterized by diversifying provision and allowing private education. For more details see Heyneman (2011) and Kuraev (2016).
- (2) This announcement was made by minister at the regular monthly briefing held by Ministry of Education and Science for the mass media on 6th of March 2016. <https://www.zakon.kz/4778299-s-2018-goda-istoriju-kazakhstan-v.html> (last accessed 23.08.2017).
- (3) In school education of Kazakhstan five languages are adopted as language of instructions — Kazakh, Russian, Uzbek, Uighur and Tajik. According to the official statistics of Ministry of Education and Science in 2016–2017 school year 7393 secondary schools in total have been functioning in the country. 3761 of them instruct in Kazakh language, 1262 in Russian, 15 in Uzbek, 13 in Uighur and 4 in Tajik. 2045 schools instruct in several languages, in other words in such schools there are classes that taught separate languages (e.g. Kazakh and Russian; Kazakh, Russian and Uzbek, Uighur or Tajik).

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Acknowledgement

This work was supported by JSPS Grant-in-Aid Scientific Research (KAKENHI) #15H05198 (2015–2017) “Roshia oyobi CIS shokoku ni okeru kyōiku kaikaku to kyōshi kyōiku no gendaika ni kansuru sougouteki chosa kenkyū (Comprehensive research of education reform and modernization of teacher education in Russia and CIS)”

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The education reform process in Kazakhstan can be divided into three stages. The first stage took nearly a decade after independence, when education reforms led by the rhetoric of international donors represented reductions in public education expenditures. The second stage lasted another ten years that started at the dawn of the new century, and the government passed hasty reforms with the purpose of integrating Kazakhstan's education into so-called "international educational space". And finally, reforms over the ongoing decade have been implemented under the slogan of developing Kazakhstan's original course of educational innovation. It took form of the establishment of an elite university and schools for gifted children which progressive teaching and learning experience (in three languages, Kazakh, Russian and English) is intended to be disseminated to all secondary schools. The success of this ambitious plan fully depends on the existence of highly qualified teachers. That is why former teacher training institutes across the country were reorganized into Centers of Excellence where teachers undergo three step training programs developed by a well-known western university. Significant funds are funneled into these professional development programs. Meanwhile reform of pre-service teacher education has undergone mainly structural transformations and was rarely prioritized by the government. This study analyzes education legislative initiatives and policy papers and indicates recent trends in teacher education reforms and the issues they cause. Specifically, this paper argues that radical and fast changes that were brought by these reforms cannot guarantee expected results for reasons such as low motivation of teachers, gaps between rural schools and schools for gifted children which practices are used for dissemination through in-service training.

カザフスタンにおける教師教育改革の動向と課題

タスタンベコワ クアニシ

本稿の目的は、カザフスタンにおける教師教育改革の動向を示し、その実施過程に生じる課題を明らかにすることである。カザフスタンでは1991年にソ連の解体に伴う独立以降展開された教育改革は三段階に分けられる。第一段階の改革は1991～2000年の間に実施され、主として国際援助機関の助言の下で教育への国家予算の削減、教育行財政の合理化を進めた。この時期には教員養成大学は統廃合に追い込まれ、また私立大学での教員養成課程の設置が認可された。第二段階は2001～2010年の間に実施され、教育の国際化が目指された。この時期には欧州高等教育共通空間への統合（ボローニャ・プロセスへの加盟）を実現するために高等教育改革の一環として教員養成課程がこれまでの5年制資格授与プログラムから4 + 2年制の学士 + 修士学位授与プログラムに再編された。第三段階の教育改革（2011年～現在）においてカザフスタンの独自の教育モデルの開発が目指され、カザフ語・ロシア語・英語を教授言語とする英才教育学校が設置され、その先進的な実践が全国の初等中等教育学校に普及されることが目標として位置づけられた。そのために教員養成課程には「専門カザフ語」、「専門ロシア語」、「専門英語」の新しい科目が導入され、三言語で授業ができる教員の養成が始まった。一方、本研究で特に注目している教員研修の改革は第三段階の教育改革のよって着手された。教員研修改革の特徴は、その制度と内容はケンブリッジ大学によって開発され、実施過程が始動されたことである。本稿はその特徴により生じる課題を指摘している。