

Kazakhstan

Demographics for Kazakhstan

Population:	15,233,244 (July 2006 est.)
GDP (by PPP method):	US\$138.7 billion
Currency (inc code):	Tenge (KZT)
Language(s):	Kazakh (Qazaq, state language) 64.4%, Russian (official, used in everyday business, designated the "language of interethnic communication") 95% (2001 est.)
Internet country code:	.kz

Primary and secondary education

The educational system of Kazakhstan has inherited much from the Soviet one, though some reforms designed to integrate it into the international educational structures are planned.

The constitution of Kazakhstan provides every citizen with a right to receive free pre-school education. Of children under five years, 63 percent attend nursery schools, most of which are state-owned.

Primary and secondary education in Kazakhstan is compulsory for all citizens. Education at school usually lasts 12 years. There are many types of secondary education and a student can choose one depending on their future plans. Usually they can choose either vocational secondary education or full secondary education which is necessary to enter a university.

Primary school in Kazakhstan starts at age six and runs from years 1-5. All primary schools are state-owned and the government guarantees the right to get a full secondary education.

The curriculum for both primary and secondary school is established by the Ministry of Education, with little choice left to the individual schools. Primary school is provided free to all citizens and residents of Kazakhstan and parents typically pay only for extra-curricular activities such as sports programs, music programs, and sometimes lab equipment or other special equipment.

Students continue in lower secondary school from year 6 to 8. This roughly corresponds to what is called in the USA, junior high school, or middle school. Typically a student in year 8 is 14-15 years old. The curriculum is a general education curriculum covering subjects like Russian literature, Kazakh language, history, physics, mathematics, biology, chemistry, and so on.

Initial training schools are designed to train students in a skilled profession. The program is usually two or three years (typically ages 16-18), but for some professional training four-year programs are required. Students who graduate can go on to Colleges for advanced vocational training or attend university. The state finances education from budget.

Lycees also provide basic vocational education, as well as general academic education, to prepare students for skilled professions. The course of study is three years, and the state finances this education from budget.

Colleges give a program that provides both academic general education and advanced vocational education. Colleges, if licensed, can also provide initial vocational education.

Programs last for three or four years (grades 10-12/13). Accelerated programs exist for students who have already completed both general secondary education and initial vocational training in the same field. Graduates may go on to university or begin working. Since the 1999 Budget Law was passed, colleges have been state-owned and self-financed. In principle, however, all compulsory education (primary and secondary) is provided free of charge.

Higher education

There are two kinds of institutes of higher education in Kazakhstan. The universities, unlike Western universities, focus entirely on teaching and do not engage in research. Students who are accepted to university at any level apply under a specific major, and the curriculum is set by the university (according to State legislation) for each major. For example, economics majors will all study the same courses in the same order, separate from English majors who have a different curriculum. Some courses are required for a variety of majors and there is a possibility of switching majors but typically classes do not transfer to the new major and the student is expected to re-enter in the new major as a first-year.

The government is currently pursuing a program to adopt a credit system which would allow students to study internationally more easily, and to add the possibility of a curriculum with electives and student-chosen courses.

There are four levels of higher education in Kazakhstan:

1. Bachelor's degree – typically a four-year degree.
2. Specialist degree – typically a five-year degree and more intensive than the Bachelor's.
3. Master's degree – typically a two-year degree, roughly corresponding to the Western Master's.
4. Doctoral degree – typically a five-year program.

Universities are usually headed by a rector, appointed by the President of Kazakhstan, who wields considerable authority over the institution, approving all decisions including those regarding curriculum, personnel, and admission. Thus Kazakhstan universities are more centralized than their Western counterparts.

In order to pursue university education, students must pass national exams in Russian, Kazakhstan history, and mathematics. Other exams may also be required for different majors, and universities often require entrance exams in selected subjects depending on the major the student wishes to pursue.

In addition, students who have received perfect marks throughout secondary school receive the Altyn Begil (Gold Medal) and can opt to take only an exam in Kazakhstan history and mathematics. If they pass, they are automatically accepted to public universities in the country. Students are assigned financial aid in the form of state grants or loans based on their scores, and state-owned universities then accept students.

State owned universities receive funding if their enrollment reaches 86,000 students, or 34 percent. A small number of universities are financed through a budget line in the Republic budget, such as art academies or international universities.

Students choose a speciality and the program is fixed by the university. The State Standards of Higher Education determine the basic content of the curriculum, students' maximum classload, as well as entrance requirements.

When students receive their diploma, they can opt to work, or obtain a Master's degree.

The second type of institute of higher education consists of institutes that focus more heavily on research but do take on students as well. They tend to prepare students for professional or scientific careers, as opposed to academic job paths.

Management education

The first MBA programs in Kazakhstan appeared in 1996. During the last ten years the number of students has been growing rapidly, 20-30 percent a year on average, and now there are more than 500 students in each of the leading institutions.

Full-time MBA is not yet popular in Kazakhstan as it is not financially beneficial for the graduates. Managers' career growth is much faster in Kazakhstan than in developed countries, so they cannot afford to leave the job market for two years. Students prefer part-time MBA programs or they come up from distant regions twice a year for two weeks to take part in so-called modular programs with leading international business schools. The three leading schools practice modular programs with the leading international institutions.

The students attend the lectures by foreign professors, go abroad for training and get Diplomas and certificates of the partner schools in addition to the Kazakhstan diploma.

Issues facing business schools

Among the major problems that Kazakhstan business education is currently facing is the absence of international accreditation of the leading business schools and a lack of qualified faculty members.

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