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Neoliberalism and Kazakhstan's Emerging Higher Education Sysytem

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

NEOLIBERALISM AND KAZAKHSTAN'S EMERGING HIGHER
EDUCATION SYSTEM

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Nazgul Bayetova

2021

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This dissertation is written by Nazgul Bayetova, and entitled Neoliberalism and Kazakhstan's Emerging Higher Education System, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for your judgement.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

Emily Anderson

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Douglas L. Robertson, Major Professor

Date of Defense: June 16th, 2021

The dissertation of Nazgul Bayetova is approved.

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Vice President for Research and Economic Development
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Florida International University, 2021

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of Nurlan Bayetov, the greatest brother.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very grateful to a number of people, who have been instrumental in completing this dissertation. However, some people deserve special mention.

My deep gratitude goes first to my major professor, academic advisor, and dissertation chair, Douglas L. Robertson, who expertly guided me through my Ph.D. education and shared his knowledge with me. I am sure this dissertation will not be completed without Dr. Robertson's constant support and weekly thought-provoking discussion meetings. Dr. Robertson gave me the right direction in choosing my dissertation topic, which is very close to my heart, higher education in my home country.

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made me believe in my strengths and academic talents. My sisters, whom I know, are always here for my children and me when I need them. My husband, Sabit Karayev, my life partner. Understanding me best as a Ph.D. candidate himself, his moral assistance and encouragement have been priceless. Thank you, my son, Nurakhmet, and my cute little daughter, Aisha, for being good kids when your mother was studying.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

NEOLIBERALISM AND KAZAKHSTAN'S EMERGING HIGHER EDUCATION
SYSTEM

by

Nazgul Bayetova

Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

Professor Douglas L. Robertson, Major Professor

The Republic of Kazakhstan is one of the Central Asian countries of the former Soviet Union (USSR). The Kazakh Social Soviet Republic's Supreme Court declared the transition from a planned economy to a market economy in the early 1990s. The new market model in Kazakhstan has had a significant impact on its evolving higher education system. Less government spending and the creation of private universities in Kazakhstan were the core strategies that have been implemented under the neoliberal policies (Sabzalieva, 2017; Sagintayeva & Kurakbayev, 2015; Smirnova, 2014; Smolentseva, 2012; Smolentseva, Huisman, & Froumin, 2018). This study's central question is how neoliberal educational policies have transformed the emerging higher education system since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

By applying grounded theory as a methodological tool and using higher education policy documents and the speeches of the former president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev (1991-2019), I examined the changes that occurred in higher education system in Kazakhstan based on neoliberalism. Kazakhstan has transitioned to higher education policies based upon core neoliberal ideas, such as privatization, meritocracy, individualism, self-reliance, and competition. However, neoliberal policies in Kazakhstan has been influenced by the local

political and governance system. Specifically, as it was found, the first president of the Republic of Kazakhstan has maintained a crucial position in shaping the contemporary higher education policies. With Nazarbayev's initiative, significant educational projects that meet core neoliberal ideas have been introduced and financially and politically prioritized despite the lack of evidence of their effectiveness. The analysis of the policy documents has revealed that higher education policy changes were informed by autocratic and leader-centric neoliberal system.

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ABBREVIATION AND ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KBTU	Kazakh-British Technical University
KSSR	Kazakh Soviet Social Republic
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
NU	Nazarbayev University
OECD	Organization of Economic Co-operation Development
RK	Republic of Kazakhstan
USSR	Unified Soviet Socialist Republic
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organization

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Kazakhstan is one of the Central Asian countries of the former Soviet Union (USSR). The Kazakh Social Soviet Republic's Supreme Court declared the transition from a planned economy to a market economy in the early 1990s. The new market model in Kazakhstan has had a significant impact on its evolving higher education system. Less government spending and the creation of private universities in Kazakhstan were the core strategies that have been implemented under the neoliberal policies (Sabzalieva, 2017; Sagintayeva & Kurakbayev, 2015; Smirnova, 2014; Smolentseva, 2012; Smolentseva, Huisman, & Froumin, 2018). This study's central question is how neoliberal educational policies have transformed the emerging higher education system since the collapse of the Soviet Union. By applying grounded theory as a methodological tool, this research examines texts of legislation and formal statements by leaders in higher education from 1993 to 2019.

Since the Soviet Union's dissolution, a new market economy system has become a pervasive term in official laws, regulations, strategic plans, and social and economic agendas in Kazakhstan. The Kazakh higher education system has adapted the significant attributes of neoliberal policies by introducing educational reforms via legislation (Massyrova, Tautenbayeva, Tussupova, Zhalalova, & Bissenbayeva, 2015; McLendon, 2004; Robertson & Bayetova, in press; Sagintayeva & Kurakbayev, 2015). Educational modernization has been underway since 1991. It has been financially and conceptually facilitated by worldwide academic stakeholders (World

Bank and Asian Development Bank) and driven by national political and educational elites (Aitzhanova, Katsu, Linn, & Yezhov, 2014).

Since the official transition from a planned financial system to a market-based economy in 1991, the Kazakh higher education system has transformed significantly. The primary changes occurred in funding and governance (Massyrova, Tautenbaeva, Tussupova, Zhalalova, & Bissenbayeva, 2014; Robertson & Bayetova, in press; Silova, 2009; Tolymbek, 2006). To aggressively promote funding diversification and increase competition among universities, the private sector and tuition charges were initiated with the Law on Education's historical introduction in 1993 (Sagintayeva & Kurakbayev, 2015). Aligned with the neoliberal theory's fundamental assumptions, Kazakhstan's power elites generated a new economic and social model (a leader-centric society) through privatization and price deregulation.

In the USSR's centrally planned economy, students in Kazakhstan were assigned which university to attend and what profession to obtain (Azimbayeva, 2017; Maksutova, 2012). On the contrary, with the neoliberal policies in independent Kazakhstan, government interference was minimized by providing students more choices in universities (public, private), funding opportunities (grants, scholarships, loans), and degrees.

Statement of the Research Problem

Although many critical scholars have recorded how the introduction of neoliberalism and a free-market economy has severely impacted higher education in the United Kingdom (Radice, 2008; 2013), in the United States (Bamberger, Morris, & Yemini, 2019; Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2007; Hamann, 2009; Radice, 2013; Saunders, 2007, 2010, 2011), and in Australia (Connell 2013, 2015), little research has been done to indicate how neoliberalism has impacted

the higher education system in developing countries, such as Kazakhstan. From 1991, Kazakhstani higher education has undergone sweeping changes by carefully introducing laws, comprehensive policies, and strategic plans. Some distinguished scholars (Ahn, Dixon, & Chermareva, 2018; Aitzhanova et al., 2014; Asanova, 2006; Bhuiyan, 2011; Hartley, Gopaul, Sagintayeva, & Apergenova, 2015; Koch, 2014; Massyrova et al., 2014; Silova, 2009; 2011; Tolymbek, 2006;) have attempted to provide critical analysis of the rules and official policies on education in Kazakhstan, but no comprehensive research has been conducted to examine how neoliberalism was progressively introduced through those policies to Kazakhstan's higher education system. To understand that process, it is necessary to critically explore the role of Kazakhstan's first president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in the complex formation of a business operation, privatization, and commercialization of higher education, as he is a chief proponent of the free-market economy. Neoliberalism was and remained an integral part of Nazarbayev's regime (1991-2019). I was unable to find any study that analyzed the president's speeches in the context of higher education, in particular, President Nazarbayev's comprehensive vision for higher education in Kazakhstan. Nor was I able to find research on conceptualizing neoliberal educational policies in the official documents. In summary, there is a need for a better understanding of changes that occurred after introducing neoliberal policies in Kazakhstani higher education. More specifically, the following research questions need to be addressed:

1. What changes occurred in the higher educational system after the introduction of neoliberal policies?
2. How do national political priorities and critical decisions made by President Nazarbayev influence higher education policy?

3. How have neoliberal educational policies been conceptualized in official and public documents?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to fill the gap in understanding how Kazakhstan, a country outside of the global core, has introduced neoliberal policies in higher education. The global core is a term used in my research to describe developed and capitalist states (Sabzalieva, 2017). This study contextualizes the development of higher education in post-Soviet Kazakhstan in neoliberal globalization. While Kazakhstan was a part of the Soviet Union, universities throughout the country were well-funded public institutions. After the political collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan was left with minimal funding, which led to the crisis in higher education. After gaining political independence, one of Kazakhstan's principal goals remains to eradicate the Soviet central system and the introduction of neoliberal market logic. That plan is associated with Western organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to open developing countries to Western corporations and markets. Higher education in Kazakhstan is still developing, and the need for research on higher education systems and policies in a rapidly growing country is clear.

During the last 28 years, Kazakhstan has been experiencing tremendous social, economic, and educational transformations. All these changes have been implemented under Kazakhstan's first president, Nazarbayev (1991-2019). By analyzing presidential speeches, laws, and strategic plans, this research aims to fill the gap in the understanding of how Kazakhstan has introduced neoliberal policies in higher education.

Statement of Significance

The current research has allowed me to trace significant changes in higher education and the economy, politics, and the local population's culture after Kazakhstan gained independence. By critically analyzing official public records, educational laws, strategic plans, presidential speeches, and social media posts, I concluded that the Kazakhstani higher education system had adapted fundamental neoliberal principles by slowly and surely introducing and constituting the body of laws and planning exercises to meet the new market realities.

Kazakhstani policymakers installed neoliberal policies, practices, and principles deliberately and thoroughly. While Nazarbayev has remained the primary actor in Kazakhstan's political arena to implement comprehensive neoliberal reforms in higher education, neoliberalism has attained socioeconomic sustainability and political invincibility. Neoliberalism has represented a fundamental component of his political regime and his critical decisions. Kazakhstan's first president has played a significant role in shaping and sustaining neoliberal core principles in all spheres of Kazakhstani social life.

My research findings are beneficial to the field of comparative and international higher education by providing an example of a new market policy's adoption after the long history of a centralized government system. In addition, it will help to evaluate the role of education and country leaders in implementing a disruptive change to the system. Countries with similar experiences and histories can learn from Kazakhstan's example of constructing a new society that embraces competition and self-interest in the market-driven economy by introducing recent higher education reforms.

Assumptions of the Study

One assumption of my study is that practices can be determined from speeches. I want to understand changes in higher education, and I am reviewing documents. This means I assume that actual changes can be determined by reviewing documents. Moreover, this study is based upon the assumptions that presidential speeches, educational laws, strategic goals, and programs implemented since independence were targeted to construct a new higher education system based on market economy principles. Following the core ideas of the market system, the government's principal goal is to a society that would develop a rational, competitive, and self-interested spirit, as neoliberalism requires. In other words, following the logic of neoliberal policies, policymakers attempt to produce a "homo economicus" or "economic man" (Hamann, 2009). Figuratively, homo economicus characterizes a person who has an infinite ability to make rational and self-interested decisions. Homo economicus is especially useful in a market economy as neoliberalism requires unrestricted entrepreneurial and competitive behavior from the citizens to be sustainable. The Kazakh government tries to actively participate in creating homo economicus by instituting, maintaining, and reassessing imposed policies. These policy instruments reflect and encourage neoliberal values, such as low state interference, privatization, price deregulation, and individualism. Hence, my research's underlying assumption is that by introducing policy instruments via speeches, laws, and strategies, the Kazakhstani government intends to build a knowledge-based society by implementing higher education reforms based upon the market system.

Definitions of the Key Terms

Communism is a political theory derived from Karl Marx, advocating class war, and leading to a society in which all property is publicly owned. Each person works and is paid according to their abilities and needs.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union was a ruling political party of the Soviet Union. The core principles of the party were democratic centralism and the open discussion of political issues.

Centralized government is a form of government in which all power is held by a solitary position or by a gathering of individuals.

A decentralized government is a kind of government that scatters control over an authoritative body instead of keeping up power among a couple of people.

Collectivism is the practice or principle of giving a group priority over each individual in it.

Post-Soviet states are 15 successor states in Asia and Europe that became independent after the dissolutions of the Soviet Union in 1991.

A market economy is a financial framework wherein monetary choices and evaluating merchandise and enterprises are guided by the connections of a nation's individual residents and organizations. There might be some administration mediation or focal arranging; however, as a rule, this term alludes to an economy that is more market situated overall.

Privatization is the transfer of a business, industry, or service from public to private ownership and control.

Price deregulation or financial deregulation refers to eliminating or reducing state regulations in the financial and economic sphere.

Homo economicus is the figurative human beings characterized by the ability to make rational choices.

A state-owned enterprise is a business enterprise where a state has various levels of control and ownership. The ownership can be full, majority, or significant minority.

In the former Soviet Union, perestroika is a policy or practice of restructuring or reforming the economic and political system.

Subjectivity

I became familiar with the term *neoliberalism* in the first semester of my master's program. The enrollment management course professor made it clear that students were customers and education was a product that universities have been selling. I got intrigued by neoliberalism, with the secrecy and mystery associated with it.

I consider myself a product of neoliberal academic policies. Core neoliberal argument suggests that every individual is born with the same capacity to achieve his/her maximum potential regardless of socioeconomic status (Steger & Roy, 2010). If an individual is competitive and determined to achieve a successful life in a market-based reality, he/she can succeed. This argument is highly controversial, and numerous social and behavioral scientists have already disproved it. Nonetheless, as it was declared earlier in this section, I note numerous parallels between my “personal career success” and neoliberal philosophical assumptions.

A single mother raised four siblings and me in households in a newly established independent Kazakhstan. The mother has a high school education, and she never received any college degree. Life was complicated, especially for low-income families like ours. Despite having low living conditions, I managed to remain a consistent “A” student at school. In the last year of high school, I knew that I wanted to go to college, and I also knew that my family could not afford tuition charges at school. I had nothing but maintained a sole option: a highly competitive state merit-based scholarship. I received it and got accepted to one of the most prestigious universities in Kazakhstan, Eurasian National University (ENU), with government support, including tuition waiver, monthly stipend, and free dormitory accommodation. To maintain the state scholarship, I was supposed to keep my GPA at a certain level (at least 3.0 or higher).

After graduating from the university, I decided to apply for an international presidential scholarship--Bolashak (“future” in English). Over 5,000 participants compete for one spot. The Bolashak Scholarship is an academic project initiated at the dawn of independence to send the most capable and competitive Kazakh youths to obtain Western education. I was one of them who had a chance to become a proud Bolashak Scholarship recipient. With the government assistantship, I received a master’s degree in Higher Education at a prestigious private research (R1) university in the United States, the University of Miami, in Miami, Florida.

In Kazakhstan, sending a child abroad for education is an unattainable dream for most low- and middle-income families. As a Ph.D. candidate in Higher Education at one of the most prestigious public research minority-serving universities in the United States, I am persuaded that I would not be able to overcome the challenges without government- and university-based financial support.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Neoliberalism has been a dominant political ideology among developed countries since the 1980s, beginning in the post-Cold War period coinciding with Ronald Reagan's presidency in the United States and Margaret Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister in the United Kingdom. Austrian economist, Friedrich A. Hayek (Hayek, 2007/1944), and his colleague, Milton Friedman (Friedman, 2002/1962) proposed a capitalist economic model, which was based on four core ideas: (a) the benefits of the free market and free trade for economic growth, (b) the lack of state regulations in the economy, (c) the sanctity of private property, and (d) the personal freedom of individuals (Harvey, 2005; Radice, 2013; Steger & Roy, 2010). For the foundation of neoliberalism in the 18th century Enlightenment liberalism, reading the *Wealth of Nations* (2019/1776) by the Scot moral philosopher, Adam Smith, the originator of modern economics, would be useful in understanding the ideas' role in the movement from monarchies to republics that emerged in the American and French Revolutions at the end of the 18th century.

The second wave of neoliberalism refers to the leadership of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair in the 1990s. As Steger and Roy (2010) indicated, Clinton and Blair were enthusiastic about "super-capitalism." Both leaders were convinced of the benefits of moderate social welfare provisions and greater corporate responsibility. During their leadership, neoliberal ideology expanded with a more significant influence across national and cultural boundaries. An influential ideological narrative has spread rapidly with major assumptions that "markets and consumerist principles are universally applicable because they appeal to all (self-interested) human beings regardless of their social context" (Steger & Roy, 2010, p. 53). One of Clinton's

core arguments during the presidential campaign and in the cabinet was that liberalization of trade and the global integration of markets would ultimately benefit all people materially.

Neoliberalism has its history and geography. Neoliberalism is a paradigm that favors free markets, private sectors, low government spending, and deregulation (Harvey, 2005; John, Daun-Barnett, & Moronski-Chapman, 2018; Klein, 2007; Levin & Aliyeva, 2015; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Saunders, 2007; Steger & Roy, 2010). Starting with experiments at the level of individual cities (New York) and countries (Chile, the United Kingdom, and the United States), neoliberalism moved to the level of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which became agents of its global expansion with defining features such as unregulated markets, privatization, competition, low taxes, and meritocracy (Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2007; Radice, 2013; Steger & Roy, 2010; Yulami, 2018). As Radice (2013) indicated, neoliberalism is the new public management paradigm, where the “values, structures, and processes of private sector management are imposed upon the public sector” (p.408). Martinez and Garcia (2000) defined neoliberalism as:

a set of economic policies that have become widespread during the last 25 years or so. Although the word is rarely heard in the United States, you can clearly see the effects of neoliberalism here as the rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer. . . Around the world, neo-liberalism has been imposed by powerful financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the American Development Bank . . . the capitalist crisis over the last 25 years, with its shrinking profit rates, inspired the corporate elite to revive economic liberalism. That’s what makes it ‘neo’ or new (p.255).

A specific form of neoliberalization of the third world countries and the former socialist camp was a series of radical reforms, collectively known as “shock therapy.” (Klein, 2007; Steger & Roy, 2010). Shock therapy is a hypothesis for clarifying how power, stealth, and emergency are utilized in executing neoliberal monetary arrangements. Klein (2007) refers to

shock therapy as disaster capitalism in which policymakers have to wait for a significant crisis to occur to sell major state enterprises to private owners. While citizens are still recovering from any shock, new reforms become permanent. In Kazakhstan, a significant crisis happened after the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991. To recover from the problem, third world countries, including Kazakhstan, accepted standardized packages of neoliberal economic reform, adopting neoliberal policies created by the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank in the form of low-interest loans and grants (Asanova, 2006; Horn & Ruff, 2012).

Steger and Roy (2010) explained that neoliberalism was built upon the classical liberal ideal of self-regulating markets. As the authors pointed out, neoliberalism has three intertwined manifestations: (1) an ideology, (2) a mode of governance, and (3) a policy package. The first dimension of neoliberalism refers to doctrines. As Steger and Roy (2010) indicated, “ideologies are systems of widely shared ideas and patterned beliefs that are accepted as truth by significant groups in society” (p.11). The leading group of people who promote these ideologies comprises global power elites, including managers and executives of large transnational corporations, influential journalists, celebrities, top entertainers, and politicians.

The second dimension of neoliberalism is a mode of governance. “A neoliberal governmentality is rooted in entrepreneurial values such as competitiveness, self-interest, and decentralization” (Steger & Roy, 2010, p.12). Neoliberal government celebrates and worships individual empowerment, and it injects competition into service. It focuses on results and funding outcomes rather than inputs. Third, neoliberalism’s other dimensions are (a) deregulation of the economy, (b) liberalization of trade and industry, and (c) privatization of state-owned enterprises. These policy measures include tax cuts, reduction of social services, and social welfare programs.

No region globally has embraced neoliberalism as enthusiastically as the post-Soviet countries (Appel & Orenstein, 2016). The scope and speed of the adaptation of neoliberal policies in post-Communist states were incomparable. Neoliberalism (with its market economies) was an attractive alternative to communism for power elites interested in expanding their wealth. The new paradigm was embraced by those elites in Russia and many former Soviet states (Bayetova & Robertson, 2019).

Kazakhstan is one of those former Soviet states and developing countries where neoliberal policies are rapidly gaining momentum (Yilamu, 2018). The Soviet past hinders the extensive practice of the core neoliberal concept of personal freedom in Kazakhstan. Although Kazakhstan was promptly recognized as a market economy by both the European Union and the United States Department of Commerce, the majority of elements attributed to a free market, such as competition, individualism, and little government involvement, are under constant pressure and threat in Kazakhstan (Hartly et al., 2015).

The assumptions of neoliberal policies are closely aligned with the assumptions of rational choice theory (Bevir & Rhodes, 2001). Rational choice theory underscores the significance of creating a self-interested individual who anticipates the outcomes of alternative courses of action and calculates which would be the best. Rational, self-interested people are more likely to choose alternatives that give them better satisfaction. Levine and Milgrom (2004) argued that “rational choice is defined to mean the process of determining what options are available and then choosing the most preferred one according to some consistent criterion” (p.11).

According to rational choice theory, the higher education system’s decisions encourage a general population to apply rationality to achieve a successful life in a market-based country. In

contrast to the communistic collective approach, changes in the country since 1991, are aligned with individualism and self-interest. Saunders (2011) argued that "if the state attempts to create or define social programs or services, including providing education, health care, and social security, it is impeding the freedom of individuals to make their own choices" (p. 23). Another aspect of neoliberalism is its propensity to exclude or ignore society (Harvey, 2005; John et al., 2018; Steger & Roy, 2010).

Neoliberalism and Higher Education

The literature on the connection between neoliberalism and higher education is mostly full of negative connotations. Researchers critique neoliberalism for turning universities into profit-making corporations, students into customers, and faculty members into service providers (Canella & Koro-Ljungberg; 2017; Kezar, DePaolo, & Scott, 2004; Saunders, 2007; 2010; 2011; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Historically, institutions of higher education have always been venues where students are nurtured academically. Students engaged in the educational process are expected not only to excel civically and morally but develop professional skills for the future post-university lives. Nonetheless, after considerable transformation of the mission of higher education, traditional institutes and values of higher education have altered drastically. Many researchers connect neoliberal policies with these changes in values and traditions (Canella & Koro-Ljungberg; 2017; Kezar, DePaolo, & Scott, 2004; Robertson, 2019, 2020; Saunders, 2007; 2010; 2011).

With the spread of neoliberal policies worldwide and the eventual influence on higher education, university management, under the pressure of limited government funding, seems to become more interested in profit-making. In other words, universities have turned to money-making business enterprises (Newfield, 2010; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Although neoliberal

higher education has been heavily criticized, the Kazakh higher education system is endeavoring to reproduce the US model of higher education. I found similar claims in most of the literature on the impact of neoliberal policies on higher education institutions in the United States, as neoliberalism radically changed the higher education system. Neoliberal policies also changed the positions of students and professors, turning students into consumers and professors into contract employees.

Giroux (2010) discussed in his article how neoliberalism had influenced public higher education in the US. In particular, the author argued that market-driven fundamentalism “is a corporate-based ideology that embraces standardizing the curriculum, supporting top-down management, and reducing all levels of education to job-training sites” (Giroux, 2010, p. 185).

Higher education, as a key political and civic organization, is no longer dedicated to solving social problems. Instead, it has evolved into an organization that, in its quest to become a primary accomplice to corporate ideals and wealth, has made social issues insignificant and invisible. Giroux (2010) indicated,

Universities and colleges have been largely abandoned as democratic public spheres dedicated to providing a public service, expanding upon humankind’s great intellectual and cultural achievements, and educating future generations to be able to confront the challenges of a global democracy. As a core political and civic institution, higher education no longer is committed to addressing social problems. Instead, it has become an institution that in its drive to become a primary accomplice to corporate values and power makes social problems both irrelevant and invisible (p. 199).

Globally, and specifically in the U.S., neoliberalism is an ideology based on individual economic rationality and the idea that a weak state is better than a vital state. What is private is necessarily good and what is public is necessarily bad (Apple, 2000). As Kandiko (2010) discussed, neoliberalism assumed that the market was more efficient than the state. As a result,

public higher education institutions and other public significant entities should be privatized instead of remaining under state control. Since the state was no longer responsible for universities, funding higher education has been less prioritized. With decreased state financial support, universities were forced to increase tuition charges, which eventually affected students. A greater burden was placed on an individual student to pay for higher education (Kandiko, 2010; Saunders, 2007; 2010; 2011).

The Foundations: Kazakhstan's Soviet Higher Education legacy

This section provides a brief historical overview to aid readers unfamiliar with the higher education system in Kazakhstan. The advent of higher education in Kazakhstan was closely connected to the USSR (Maksutova, 2004). The Soviet Union (1922-1991) initiated many social, economic, and academic reforms in the Soviet Kazakh Republic (1936-1991). The literacy campaign was approved, and instead of conventional schools, an alternative comprehensive school for all layers of the population was introduced. Specialized professional, vocational, and high schools were founded (Kyzykeyva & Oskolkova, 2011; Maksutova, 2004; Smolensteva et al., 2018).

All universities opened in the Soviet Kazakh Republic since the 1920s were significantly influenced by the communist party (Kyzykeyeva & Oskolkova, 2011). The Soviet government set out to reshape the society dramatically in Kazakhstan, and they demanded an academic system to facilitate this change. As Kissane (2005) emphasized in his study about history education in Kazakhstan, “education served to support the ideology of the Soviet state and gave little attention to what was then referred to as the Kazakh SSR” (p.48).

In the Soviet Union, all citizens were given a constitutional right to education, which was delivered by public schools and universities. Following the creation of the Soviet Union in 1922,

the education system became globally renowned for its effectiveness in eliminating illiteracy and fostering a highly educated population. Its benefits included universal access for all residents and post-secondary education. (Kyzykeyva & Oskolkova, 2011) The Soviet Union recognized that their system's foundation depended upon an educated population and development in the broad fields of engineering, the natural sciences, the life sciences and social sciences, and primary education. (Kyzykeyva & Oskolkova, 2011; Maksutova, 2004; Smolentseva et al., 2018).

The first secular educational institution was opened in 1928 by the initiative of the Soviet government. The secular institutes included Kazakh State University (1928), Kurmangazy Kazakh State Conservatory (1944), 19 teacher training institutes, five medical and ten polytechnic institutes. Before this, higher education experts were trained in Moscow, Leningrad, and Tashkent (the capital of Uzbekistan) (Ahn et al., 2018; Smolentseva, 2012).

Higher education during the Soviet period lacked native Kazakh students and executive staff. Instruction in Kazakh universities was in Russian, and Kazakh students improved their comprehension and fluency in Russian. The Soviet government changed the education structure from one of the arguably backward religious institutions to a secular system built upon Marxist/Leninist philosophy (Ahn et al., 2018; Rummyantseva, 2005; Silova, 2011). The modern approach was centralized, and until 1991, when Kazakhstan achieved independence, there were no private universities. Only state universities were opened, and they followed the rules from Moscow.

In Soviet times, higher education was free for everybody. Students regarded higher education in Kazakhstan as a professional activity requiring full-time dedication. To assist students in material matters, the government developed a program for their support. Every quarter, students were provided with an allowance, the size of which depended upon their

financial status and academic achievements. However, the students who failed the final assessments at the end of the semester or came from families with high incomes were disqualified from receiving an allowance. The principle of free education ensured students did not have to buy textbooks or any institutional materials; sufficient quantities of these materials existed in the libraries of higher education institutions or municipalities. All university facilities were available at no charge. Accordingly, the government could not support teachers adequately. The teachers' monthly payments were about 420 rubles, which are equivalent to 6.98 dollars. (Argument & Facti, newspaper,(2002), p.5). After independence, an insignificant increase in faculty salary occurred. Mclendon (2004) indicated that in the 1990s, "the average faculty member at a state-supported university earns approximately \$150 a month" (p. 284).

Since the Ministry of Higher Education was founded in 1957, all universities were obligated to follow the central government's prescribed administrative rules. These rules included Khrushchev's (1958-1964) ideas of approximation of intellectual and physical work and the strengthening of the connection between school and industry (Kyzykeyeva & Oskolkova, 2011). Nikita Khrushchev was the first secretary of the Communist Party and led the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In 1958, the Soviet law "About Strengthening of Connection of School and Life" was passed (Rumyantseva, 2005; Silova, 2011). With this new law, compulsory eight-year schooling was brought in instead of the seven-year and ten-year education. Upon completing compulsory education, the graduates were obliged to work in factories or agriculture for three years, combining work and study or studying at polytechnic schools. The major factor for university acceptance was an applicant's industrial experience rather than the applicant's academic preparation. In Kazakhstan, the transition to the alternative system of compulsory eight-year schooling was completed in 1962-1963 (Silova, 2011).

Higher Education in Kazakhstan after 1991

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and Kazakhstan's independence in 1991, the education system of Kazakhstan faced difficulties. The primary reasons for the crisis were as follows: (a) economic crisis, (b) emigration of the Russian-speaking population, and (c) transformation from the Soviet centralized system to the market-oriented society. (Maksutova, 2004). The president of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev, personally devoted extensive attention to higher education problems from the first days of independence in 1991. Nazarbayev considers the solution to the problem of higher education in implementing regulatory programs, such as the adaptation of the western admission model and the establishment of private higher education institutions (Kyzykeyeva & Oskolkova, 2011).

The fundamental changes took place in the field of curricula. They involve the reduction of the ideological burden of the past and the elimination of the mandatory study by all students in such core courses as follows: (a) History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, (b) Scientific Communism, and (c) Scientific Atheism. The new market economy combined with new curricula, mainly in management, marketing, and investment (Rumyantseva, 2005; Silova, 2011). As an independent country, Kazakhstan established new ties with the world's institutions of higher learning, including the U.S. (the University of Pennsylvania, Duke University, Wisconsin-Madison University, Pittsburgh University, Carnegie-Mellon University, etc.) and international financial institutions (the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank).

In the early 1990s, Kazakhstan required the transition from a planned to a market economy. Without international assistance, Kazakhstan's evolution would be impossible. Hamann (2009) indicated that transnational organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization use their global reach to dictate

neoliberal social policies via "Structural Adjustment Programs" (SAPs). Other development agencies are the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which operates in the Asian continent (Asanova, 2006; Mercer & Weidman, 2004). ADB began to assist Kazakhstan in 1994. As Asanova (2006) indicated, since 1994, ADB has approved sovereign and non-sovereign loans and grants countries worth more than \$5 billion (Asian Development Bank and Kazakhstan: fact sheet, 2018). The World Bank (WB) has also supported Kazakhstan in the critical transition to a market economy (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). The WB has lent over \$3.8 billion to Kazakhstan to develop various projects (The World Bank in Kazakhstan: Country snapshot, 2018).

Because of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a significant decline in public spending triggered the search for other higher education funding sources. As a result, international development agencies began to establish a presence in Post-Soviet Countries in the 1990s. During this period, the Kazakh higher education system was significantly lacking financial support from the government. Kazakhstan's public expenditure on education as an overwhelming proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) declined by more than half, from 6.8% in 1990, to 2.9% of an exceedingly smaller GDP in 1994 (Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2002b). In this transitional period, Kazakhstan's higher education could only survive by receiving financial support from development agencies, like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

The Rise of the Private Higher Education Sectors

When the newly named Republic of Kazakhstan left the Soviet Union on December 16, 1991, the economic system changed to a neoliberal economic paradigm, consistent with Russia's transition and other former Soviet states. The Kazakh higher education system also transformed

into a neoliberally informed system. Features of a neoliberal higher education system include privatization of what were publicly provided goods and services. Privatization enlarges opportunities to create wealth for private entities that tend to be related to power elites (Bayetova & Robertson, 2019; Robertson & Bayetova, in press). Neoliberalism's deification of unregulated markets and competition (regardless of the inherent advantages of high positioned socio-economic groups and their corruption) privileges power elites in privatization.

Kazakhstan's economic policy agenda emphasizes the social significance of comprehensive research universities to compete in the global knowledge economy. Comparative educational researcher Carnoy (1992) insisted that "education is a fundamental instrument of change in revolutionary societies" (p. 63). Kazakhstan affirms this view by "creating a regulatory structure that could create the conditions under which education reform could take place" (Ahn et al., 2018, p. 204). The most noticeable changes are aligned with the core tenets of neoliberalism, particularly the sanctity of private ownership, competition, and a knowledge-driven economy. As a result, dozens of alternative private institutions emerged after Kazakhstan adopted the marketization and commercialization policies in higher education.

Privatization is one of the chief tenets of neoliberalism. Calls for privatization in most Communist countries began in the 1970s (Mitrofanskaya, 2011). However, the boom of privatization occurred after the Soviet Union collapsed (1991). Bogdan (2012) indicated that privatization in post-Soviet countries had unique features. In most capitalist states, the successful privatization process took several decades, whereas post-Soviet countries implemented privatization policies in less than a decade. For the effective market economy transition, post-Soviet states transferred thousands of state-owned enterprises into private entities. Higher education institutions were no exception. The privatization of higher education institutions in

Kazakhstan started after introducing the Law on Higher Education in 1993. As Yulami (2018) indicated, “privatization has been a fundamental component of Kazakhstan’s neoliberal reforms” (p. 99).

The quest for higher education changes through Western-style universities’ creation was not the beginning of neoliberal discourse in Kazakhstan. Previously, the *perestroika* (transformation or restructuring) period dramatically changed the relationship of higher education with the economy, establishing market-like relations (Azimbayeva, 2017). The *perestroika* period started in 1985 and lasted for about seven years. It is believed the pre-independent Kazakhstan took the discourse of neoliberalism within the *perestroika* period. During this transitional phase, Kazakhstan endorsed marketization processes in education; however, the majority of “educational reforms borrowed from the “West” have often mutated as they clashed with socialist legacies during the implementation stage” (Silova, 2009, p.315). The neoliberal theory emphasizes the state’s reduced role in market regulation and private property protection (Bamberger et al., 2019).

The first steps in a neoliberal direction were taken in Kazakhstan in 1993, after introducing the Law on Education (Sagintayeva & Kurakbayev, 2015). After the passage of this law, dozens of new private universities emerged across the country. In the 2000s, with President Nazarbayev’s initiative, public universities transformed into joint-stock companies. The introduction of university fees was also a critical starting point because it redefined higher education as a commodity, not a civil right (Lane, 1992). The government also introduced student educational grants and loans given directly to students, not universities. Student grants and loans were a significant incentive to develop competition among universities for government resources (Johns et al., 2018).

Neoliberalism is closely related to the dissemination of free-market policies, privatization, and deregulation of education services. During the height of the privatization movement in the 1990s, when the neoliberal ideology and policies supporting privatization gained its popularity (Lubienski, 2006), the Kazakh government began establishing a private sector. Kazakhstan declared its independence in 1991 from the USSR and immediately started three privatization phases, including privatizing higher education institutions. Some scholars argue that privatization could be a catalyst for societal growth (Mitrofanskaya, 2011; Lubienski, 2006). Privatization is an inevitable part of decentralizing a national economy. By reducing a government's role in the country's management, privatization forces market mechanisms to work.

When Kazakhstan became independent in 1991, only 55 state-owned universities operated in Kazakhstan. This number doubled by 124 having public and private universities in 2018-19 (Azimbayeva, 2017; Sagintayeva & Kurakbayev, 2015). In the 2015-2016 academic year, Kazakhstan had 127 higher educational establishments, of which five were national universities, 19 institutions, 20 academies, and 83 universities. Almost two-thirds of Kazakh universities (77 establishments) were owned privately, and a further 50 were state-owned. The country also had five branches of foreign higher educational establishments (Energy Prom, 2014). The next phase of privatization was in the early 2000s. While in the 1990s, the plethora of new private universities was launched, in the 2000s, the Kazakh government initiated the privatization of public universities throughout the country (Azimbayeva, 2017; Lane, 1992; Maksutova, 2004; Sagintayeva & Kurakbayev, 2015).

New Funding Model

Since the introduction of neoliberal reforms, government spending on higher education has shrunk dramatically. The restructuring period was characterized by a significant decrease in higher education financing, having budget allocations drop “from 1.47% in 1960 to 0.97% in 1986” (Lane, 1992, p. 299) in all Soviet republics. To be specific, in Kazakhstan, about 65% of public universities’ budgets came from the Ministry of Education and Science in the early 2000s (Maksutova, 2004). The rest of the funding came from various sources.

Study at public universities in the USSR was free, but universities started to charge tuition after the transition to a market economy. To increase competition among public and private universities, the Kazakh government introduced a new model of funding. State-funded educational grants and loans are provided directly to students, not universities. As a result, universities in Kazakhstan compete on a national level to recruit more students with government money, and those who pay from private funds. Competition for students is a battle for income (Bayetova & Robertson, 2019). Currently, public universities are winning this battle. Although the number of public universities is almost two times lower than the number of private universities, 52% of the enrollment attends public universities. Low enrollment could be due to private universities’ negative reputation in the 1990s when some were exposed to be selling diplomas and grades to their students.

The government has favored universities with research capacity by introducing financial support to graduate students. Nazarbayev University (NU), a state-funded research university established in 2010 by Nursultan Nazarbayev, the president of the republic from 1991-2019, developed extensive research capacity by developing significant partnerships with American research universities including Duke University, University of Pennsylvania, University of

Wisconsin-Madison, and University of Pittsburgh, as well as international agencies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Central Asian Development Bank (Ayoubi & Al-Habaibeh, 2006; Horta, 2009; Kucera, 2010; Seidimbek, 2013).

According to Kucera (2010), to encourage the highest standards, the government granted NU special autonomous status and legal protection from external interference, meaning NU is independent of bureaucratic governance and any restriction on academic freedom. NU has been the recipient of the most significant amount of government funding every year since 2006.

The result of reforms has led to the distribution of government funding among a limited number of universities and has hindered the decentralization and development of higher education throughout Kazakhstan. According to the latest OECD report (2017), public higher education spending stood at about USD \$400 million. These levels of investment as a percentage of GDP are substantially lower than in many peer countries. Despite this fact, Nazarbayev University, with the Ministry of Education and Science's support, maintains internationally competitive salaries and benefits for its foreign staff and faculty (Kucera, 2010; Seidimbek, 2013).

The OECD review team has concluded that Nazarbayev University is “too expensive” (OECD report, 2017, p.190). Nevertheless, Nazarbayev University has a special autonomous status, and it opened with the help of the Eurasian Natural Resources Corporation, a private diversified natural resources company, which donated over \$98 million (Horn & Fuff, 2012). Interestingly, when Nazarbayev University started to accept its first cohort, education was free of charge; however, after almost five years of operation, the university leadership established a tuition fee of roughly \$20,000 per academic year (Horn & Ruff, 2012).

All universities in Kazakhstan, including Nazarbayev University, are encouraged to pursue private funding and retain the right to establish corporate partnerships with domestic and international companies without government involvement (Altbach, 2005; Knight, 2001; Nadoo, 2009). The government has stimulated more accountability and responsibility by establishing a new university governance system with every institution supervised by trustees. All these measures demonstrate the government's goal of university deregulation.

Educational Policy Borrowing after Independence

The systematic collapse of one of the most advanced and comprehensive educational systems in the Soviet Union left no choice for the Kazakhstan government to seek alternative academic methods after gaining political independence in 1991. In the times of evident inadequacy of academic, economic, political, and social provisions after disseminating the USSR, Kazakhstan shifted its attention to well-developed Western educational models. Kazakhstan has become a "borrower" of educational models. Silova (2004) pointed out that educational borrowing had become one of the critical strategies in postsocialist academic reform processes after the USSR collapsed. Most of the postsocialist states were required to modernize and adopt a new educational system to meet the market economy's needs and to integrate into the European Union (EU) (Silova, 2004; 2011; Tampayeva, 2013).

Phillips (2004) had difficulties with the term "borrowing" in educational policy. As Phillips (2004) indicated, "copying and reproduction are among alternatives that sometimes have been preferred to describe the transfer of policy from one national context to another " (p.54). Silova (2004) explained the process of educational borrowing in postsocialist states through political sociology and history, "including: (1) the culturalist perspective on educational borrowing in the context of globalization; (2) the effects of Soviet institutional and cultural

legacies; and (3) discursive power” (p.75). In the cultural perspective of educational borrowing, the local agency is placed in the center of educational transformation. It is not imposed but preferably applied as a mechanism to meet a country’s own educational needs. The cultural approach disproves a wide-spread argument that globalization causes homogenization. Soviet cultural and institutional legacies have a significant effect on the implementation of a new educational model. As Silova (2004) suggested, new borrowed models do not replace the old ones but legitimize them.

Silova was one of the first researchers who studied and provided a detailed description of educational policy borrowing in the former Socialist states. However, as Silova (2004) recognized, there is an evident diversity among postsocialist states, especially in the Central Asian states like Kazakhstan. Several researchers (Drummond, 2011; Steiner-Khamisi, 2012) considered all Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan) as one standard body, which must secure external funding from donors to enable the development of higher education. However, as Tampayeva (2015) indicated, Kazakhstan is altogether different. In 1999, the policymakers decided to provide higher education funding from internal sources and significantly reduce international stakeholders’ loans. Hence, some researchers believed that Kazakhstan should not be recognized as a part of Central Asian states in this sense (Kalikova & Silova, 2008; Kuzhabekova, Soltanbekova, & Almukhambetova, 2018; Tampayeva, 2015).

Kazakhstan was one of the Central Asian states, which voluntarily refused external funding from the Western donor organizations after ten years of significant financial assistance. The Republic of Kazakhstan’s president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, designated Kazakhstan as a donor-independent country (Kalikova & Silova, 2008; Kuzhabekova, Soltanbekova, &

Almukhambetova, 2018). Kalikova and Silova (2008) pointed out that “the government has used its resources for education reform, emphasizing the need for closer collaboration with local experts” (p.138).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of my inquiry is to fill the research gap in the comprehension of how Kazakhstan, a developing nation that in many ways is on the periphery of the developed nations, has realized neoliberal strategies in developing its emerging higher education system. While Kazakhstan was a part of the Soviet Union, colleges throughout the nation were well-financed open-access institutions (Maksutova, 2004). After the political breakdown of the Soviet Union (1922-1991), Kazakhstan was left with restricted financing. After increasing political autonomy, one of Kazakhstan's objectives was to destroy the Soviet-focus framework and incorporate neoliberal market concepts. To better understand the transformation under the market system, it is necessary to examine President Nazarbayev's comprehensive vision of modern Kazakhstan. Being the most influential and popular political leader in independent Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev has transitioned his higher education vision through educational laws, strategic plans, and state programs.

The considerable influence of neoliberal policies was not extensively examined in the context of higher education in Kazakhstan. Since the concept of neoliberalism and its impact on the emerging higher education system in Kazakhstan needs to be explored and understood because little research has been done, a qualitative approach can be an effective methodology to explore the current phenomena. As Cresswell and Poth (2018) underscored:

qualitative research is especially useful when the researcher does not know the important variables to examine. This type of approach may be needed because the topic is new, the subject has never been addressed with a certain sample or group of people, and existing theories do not apply with the particular sample or group under study (p.49).

Janasik, Honkela, and Bruun (2009) suggested that the data collection process does not necessarily define a qualitative study. Conversely, Janasik et al. (2009) argued that an examination's subjective character lives not in the information accumulation technique yet in the information type and the strategy with which the information is broken down. In their view, in a qualitative study, the information should not be changed over to numeric qualities, and scientific and measurable apparatuses should not be utilized in the examination. Alternatively, the story is prepared through systematization, classification, and interpretation.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is drawn from Silova's (2004; 2009) characterization of creating a private sector and the privatization of public institutions as key strategies in post-socialist academic reform processes. As Silova (2005) interpreted, the emergence of a private sector in post-Socialist states had been paralleled with disseminating the neoliberal philosophy in this region. Under the pressure of economic, social, and educational constraints, post-Socialist states got involved in *educational policy borrowing* or *educational policy lending*. In the USSR's planned economy, the state transferred its property to state institutions and enterprises' operational and economic management while remaining the property owner. The new market economy system introduced in Kazakhstan after 1991 enabled state property transfer to private ownership (Azimbayeva, 2017; Sagintayeva & Kurakbayev, 2015). The state became a private legal entity, usually a joint-stock company or limited liability partnership. Possessing a block of shares (usually 30-35%) in a joint-stock company, the state becomes an ordinary participant in an official entity that follows the rules of participation, regulated by the civil law of private legal entities (Mitrofanskaya, 2011).

The systematic collapse of one of the most advanced and comprehensive educational systems in the Soviet Union left no choice for the Kazakhstan government to seek alternative academic systems after gaining political independence in 1991. In the times of evident inadequacy of academic, economic, political, and social provisions after disseminating the USSR, Kazakhstan shifted its attention to well-developed Western educational models. Kazakhstan has become a “borrower” of educational models. Silova (2004) pointed out that educational borrowing had become one of the key strategies in post socialist academic reform processes after the USSR collapsed. Most of the post socialist states were required to modernize and adopt a new academic system to meet the market economy’s needs and integrate into the European Union (EU) (Silova, 2004; 2011; Tampayeva, 2013).

Phillips (2004) had difficulties with the term “borrowing” in educational policy. As Phillips (2004) indicated, “copying and reproduction are among alternatives that sometimes have been preferred to describe the transfer of policy from one national context to another ” (p.54). Silova (2004) explained the process of educational borrowing in post socialist states through political sociology and history, “including: (1) the culturalist perspective on educational borrowing in the context of globalization; (2) the effects of Soviet institutional and cultural legacies; and (3) discursive power” (p.75). In the cultural perspective of educational borrowing, the local agency is placed in the center of educational transformation. It is not imposed but preferably applied as a mechanism to meet a country’s own educational needs. The cultural approach disproves a wide-spread argument that globalization causes homogenization. In this context, education policy borrowing should not be considered imposed, and rather it is an alternative mechanism to improve current reforms. In these realities, “the local agency is not perceived as a “helpless victim” that is ruthlessly manipulated and controlled by global forces.

Rather, the local agency is capable of pursuing its interests by manipulating global forces” (Silova, 2004, p. 76).

Second, Soviet cultural and institutional legacies significantly affect the implementation of a new educational model. As Silova (2004) suggested, new borrowed models do not replace the old ones but legitimize them. Historical context plays a significant role in policy borrowing in post-Socialist states. Even after the fall of the empire, political, cultural, and educational legacy proceeds for a long time. Third, education policy borrowing is also characterized by the transfer of practice and the transition of discourses.

Silova was one of the first researchers who studied and provided a detailed description of educational policy borrowing in the former Socialist states. As Silova (2004) recognized, there is an evident diversity among post-socialist states, especially in the Central Asian states like Kazakhstan. Several researchers (Drummond, 2011; Steiner-Khamisi, 2012) considered all Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) as one standard body, which must secure external funding from donors to enable the development of higher education. However, Tampayeva (2015) indicated that Kazakhstan is altogether different, so that in 1999, the policymakers decided to provide funding for higher education from internal sources and significantly reduce the number of loans from international stakeholders. Hence, some researchers believed that Kazakhstan should not be recognized as a part of Central Asian states in this sense (Kalikova & Silova, 2008; Kuzhabekova, Soltanbekova, & Almukhambetova, 2018; Tampayeva, 2015).

Kazakhstan was one of the Central Asian states, which voluntarily refused external funding from the Western donor organizations after ten years of significant financial assistance. It was an initiative of the first president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, to

designate Kazakhstan as a donor-independent country (Kalikova & Silova, 2008; Kuzhabekova, Soltanbekova, & Almukhambetova, 2018). Kalikova and Silova (2008) pointed out that “the government has used its resources for education reform, emphasizing the need for closer collaboration with local experts” (p.138).

The refusal of external educational assistance did not mean total isolation. Like other Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan followed and adopted educational policies, which were borrowed. Steiner-Khamsi, Silova, and Johnson (2013) categorized Kazakhstan as a “late adopter” of education policy borrowing and lending. In other words, countries like Kazakhstan adopted new educational policies “at a time when it had already gone global, or in some places, was already in decline” (Steiner-Shamsi, Silova, & Johnson, 2013, p. 221). Specific questions emerge as it is not clear what was borrowed and adapted to the higher education system in Kazakhstan. As part of my research, there is an obvious necessity to determine how neoliberal policies were transferred to Kazakhstani higher education. The rationales for adopting new educational policies in post-Soviet states vary considerably. For example, Steiner-Shamsi, Silova, and Johnson (2013) discussed their paper that “in Kyrgyzstan, the Outcome-based Education (OBE) [s] reform was seen as a response to corruption on education, in Mongolia it was embraced for economic reasons, and in Kazakhstan, it was driven by a political quest to become part of western advanced economies” (p.239.) In my research, I intend to follow the latter argument about Kazakhstan’s political quest to join the western economic world by implementing disruptive change in the higher education system.

The Application of Grounded Theory as a Theoretical Framework and a Methodological Approach to Address Research Purposes

In my analysis, I will employ a theoretical framework, and methodological approach called *grounded theory* (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology, which underscores creating concepts using a radically inductive approach by applying constant comparison, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding techniques. A well-known German mixed-methods researcher Kunkatz (2014) described grounded theory “as a method, in which codes and categories play a central role” (p.15). Moreover, according to Grbich (2007), grounded theory is the right choice when little is known about a phenomenon and “the researcher wants to study a microcosm of interaction in specific contexts or to study changes in a particular field” (p.83).

After getting familiar with many research methodologies, I decided to apply grounded theory’s data analysis procedures to my research, as minimal information is available about the influence of the market system on higher education in Kazakhstan. Because the theory is “grounded” in actual data, I intend to analyze and develop a theory after completing a comprehensive data analysis. The grounded theory provides a researcher with much flexibility and mobility. Strauss and Corbin (1990) called grounded theory a *technique* “for analyzing data that will lead to the development of theory,’ which can be carried out regardless of the philosophical perspective, the phenomenon under study, or the research situation; a position that shows enormous flexibility” (p.27). Finally, yet importantly, grounded theory is commonly used in policy research analysis. Thomas and Yang (2012) in their study about the impact of neoliberal policies on Taiwanese universities, applied grounded theory and argued that “it is a methodology usually associated with qualitative research that emphasizes building concepts inductively using constant comparison, open coding, selective coding, and memoing” (p.180).

The Evolution of Grounded Theory

Each researcher, who discussed grounded theory in their works, mentioned that it originates from two influential qualitative researchers Glaser and Strauss (Age, 2011; Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2016; Kuckartz, 2014; Suddaby, 2019; Wert et al., 2011). Grounded theory was introduced in the 1960s when most social science studies were conducted by implementing a quantitative approach. Qualitative studies were lacking rigor and theoretically meaningful features (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As a result, in the middle of the dispute about qualitative and quantitative methods to approach research, Glaser, and Strauss (1967) introduced grounded theory, targeting novice researchers. Legewie and Schervier-Legewie (2004) argued that “grounded theory is best for “kids” - as people above the age of 30 seemed to be too committed to other theories” (p. 51). Grounded theory generated a new wave of qualitative researchers with rigorous inductive methods for generating concepts and conceptual structures.

Classic grounded theory has been changed and evolved dramatically. Glaser and Strauss had a dispute over data analysis and have never published together since the 1970s. The significant disagreement was associated with Glaser’s dedication to a radically inductive and theory-free approach, whereas Strauss became a follower of a mixture of inductive and deductive methods. Strauss (1995) allowed a comprehensive literature review before the data analysis process, while Glaser (2001) believed that in an authentic, grounded theory, researchers had to approach data analysis with an “empty brain.” Glaser’s ideas about grounded theory were criticized for this point. Kunkartz (2014) stated in his book that “the blank state of the researchers’ brain is an illusion” (p.10). It is naive to think that the researchers leave aside their theoretical ideas.

Charmaz (2006) and Clarke (2016) established an updated version of grounded theory emphasizing postmodern and constructivist paradigms. Charmaz (2006) underscored the significance of the relationship between a researcher and a text. The researcher brings a lot to the data that theory should not be thought of as discovered but rather as constructed. Clarke (2016) developed a situational analysis by extending grounded theory modes of research to include nonhuman objects as data sources. Glaser and Strauss (1967) and other early qualitative methodologists, such as Robert Bogdan, had nonhuman objects in their approaches.

Data Sources

The application of policy documents as primary data has become quite common in qualitative research. Technologies and the internet allow accessing any documents today of any country. Easy access and generally low cost made documents a widespread data source in qualitative text analysis. Interviews are still the most popular among qualitative researchers, though. Nevertheless, without diminishing the vital role of textual policy documents, I noticed a slight shift. I found many studies that used textual documents as primary data sources. It is prevalent in policy research since this type of research requires a variety of policy documents.

Although semi-structured interviews and observations are the most preferred in grounded theory, in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Glaser and Strauss (1967) mentioned the dictum “all is data.” While the grounded theory is a complex methodology, it is also inherently flexible (Tie, Birks, & Francies, 2019). Therefore, grounded theory’s flexibility allows the researchers to use quantitative and qualitative data and various data sources, including documents (Charmaz, 2006; Ralph, Birks, & Chapman, 2014).

Ralph et al. (2014) pointed out that there was a lack of consensus among researchers about applying documents in grounded theory as primary sources of data. Initially, Glaser and

Strauss (1967) wrote in their book that documents “hardly be used as a chief source of data” (p.168), while more contemporary researchers Charmaz (2006) and Ralph et al. (2014) supported the shift in the use of documents as primary and secondary sources of data for researching the studied phenomena.

Among the other influential contemporary researchers of grounded theory, Charmaz (2006) discussed that all qualitative research entailed analyzing text from different data sources. Therefore, textual documents in grounded theory must be treated as text that can be coded and categorized as interview transcripts. The same researcher distinguishes two types of texts that are most common in text analysis; elicited texts involve a researcher’s direct participation in collecting them. Extant texts consist of various documents that a researcher has no hand in shaping.

As Charmaz (2006) indicated, “researchers treat extant texts as data to address their research questions although these texts were produced for other--often very different purposes” (p.35). Furthermore, Ralph et al. (2014) indicated, “the use of documents as a source of extant data is relatively common in grounded theory research” (p.1). Lastly, Chong and Yeo (2015) stated, “in general, data could be collected in forms of interviews, observations, focus group discussions, and documents” (p.261).

Richards and Farrokhnia (2016) applied Charmaz's (2006) constructive theory of grounded theory to analyze the World Trade Organization’s policy documents about E-Commerce. The authors indicated that the application of textual records in policy research was important since "policy research often needs to consider secondary and less formal texts to clarify and contextualize formal policy documents and positions" (Richards & Farrokhnia. 2016,

p. 6). In their study, over 350 policy documents were coded, categorized, and theorized based on grounded theory.

Data Collection

In my study, I will exclusively use extant texts as my primary data to explore the effect of neoliberalism in the higher education system since the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Although semi-structured interviews are traditionally used in the classical or original version of grounded theory, I will employ the latest extended adaptation of grounded theory to use only documents. In particular, I will follow Charmaz's model of constructive grounded theory, which will enable researchers to bring elements of a pre-existing theoretical framework to a grounded analysis of textual data.

Qualitative textual analysis requires a wealth of previous knowledge and an understanding of a textual document's language. Kuckartz (2014), in *Textual Qualitative Analysis* indicated, that "the more we know, the better we can recognize that a text has different levels of meaning" (p. 17). By following text analysis requirements, I will be working with an extensive number of textual documents. My prior knowledge, work experience, and language proficiency will increase my textual data's general understanding. I was born three years before Kazakhstan declared its independence, so I experienced almost all education changes from K-12 to higher education. I hold a bachelor's degree in Education, and I have teaching experience. I am a recipient of the Presidential Scholarship to study abroad. Finally, yet importantly, in my study, I will use textual documents in Kazakh, Russian, and English languages. As Kuckartz (2014) addressed in his book, researchers have to understand the language of texts. Kazakh is my mother tongue; I went to a Russian school; and I completed my master's degree and currently pursuing a doctoral degree in English.

Before working with any texts, Charmaz (2006) explained that it was essential to situate texts in their contexts. In the process of collecting the data for my dissertation, I am utilizing the contextual questions below to identify the context of my texts, as suggested by Charmaz (2006):

- Where does data come from?
- Who participated in shaping them?
- What did the authors intend?
- Do I have sufficient knowledge of the relevant worlds to read the words in these texts with any understanding?

Policy documents are categorized as “extent texts” in Charmaz’s constructivist model of grounded theory and in this way considered valuable data sources. After creating research questions, I started my initial systematic data collection in August 2018. I had a few challenges while collecting data from the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) in Kazakhstan - <http://www.edu.gov.kz/>. The official website of MES did not let get to and download the documents and reports from August 2018 to July 2019. To receive access to official texts, I reached out to MES via email and phone calls a few times. In the end, in July 2019, MES granted me access. From the official website of MES, I obtained two valuable documents in Russian and English for my research: Law on Higher Education 1993 and Law on Education 2007. Law on Higher Education 1993 provides essential sources of data about the establishment of private universities in Kazakhstan.

According to Vollstedt and Rozet (2019), one characteristic of grounded theory is that "data collection, data analysis, and theory development are not successive steps in the research procedure but are intertwined and interdependent" (p.85). At the beginning of the

analysis, I have collected over 2000 pages of various documents. However, as I predicted in my dissertation proposal, I have engaged in further data collection cycles after conducting data analysis, which was guided by theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is a cumulative sampling method where the selection of new cases, which are included in the data analysis, is directed by the unfolding theory (Vollstedt & Rozet, 2019). As Corbin and Strauss (2015), cases to be selected did not necessarily mean human beings; conversely, "it is concepts and not people, per se, that are sampled" (p. 135).

At the initial stage, I have selected cases that are more likely to discover new relevant concepts. Later on, I have selected cases with an intention to contribute to the differentiation, elaboration, consolidation, and validation of categories in terms of their properties, their dimensions, or their interrelations. New data was selected until the theoretical saturation was achieved. In other words when new data no longer contributed to the elaboration of categories.

To address my first research question about the changes that occurred in the system of higher education after the neoliberal policies were introduced in Kazakhstan, I have utilized written documents of state programs, such as (a) *Strategy for the Development of Kazakhstan as a Sovereign State - 1994 (63 pages)*, (b) *Strategy Kazakhstan 2030 (49 pages)*, (c) *Strategy Kazakhstan 2050 (17 pages)*, (d) *State program of education development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020 (55 pages)*. Documents (a), (b), ©, and (d) were signed by the president of the country Nursultan Nazarbayev and were delivered to the public by Nazarbayev as well. In comparison, document (d) was authorized by the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan (MES).

The analysis of the strategic planning of the country concerning the market economy is an essential part of my study. I am deeply convinced that the strategies I have chosen so far are essential to Kazakhstan because they provide a sense of direction and outline measurable goals. Besides, the country's strategic plans are useful tools for guiding day-to-day priorities and decisions that influence higher education reforms. Finally, I believe that strategic plans are essential in evaluating progress and change.

To address my second research question about the influence of President Nazarbayev's critical decisions and political priorities on higher education, I used the speeches of the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev. In 1990 Nazarbayev was named the first president of Kazakhstan and ran the country for almost 26 years. The president announced his resignation in March 2019. Analyzing the speeches of Nazarbayev is crucial because he had introduced reforms in education aligned with neoliberal policies. While Reagan and Thatcher were the most influential figures in disseminating neoliberal values in the 1980s in the US and UK (Radice, 2013), Nursultan Nazarbayev, the president of Kazakhstan, is a vocal advocate of market economy in Central Asia.

Furthermore, Osipian (2018) summarized that “compared to other former communist rulers, whose speeches and politics are full of empty rhetoric, Nazarbayev's ideas have resulted in bold reforms” (para. 2). Presidential speeches were collected from the official site of the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan. All speeches are available in Russian and Kazakh languages. I gathered over 24 textual documents, named *Message from the President* from June 1994 to March 2019. I have collected over 445 pages of presidential speeches delivered by Nazarbayev during his presidential term. I started collecting presidential speeches in August 2018 (see Table 1). During the data collection process, the president announced his unanticipated

resignation in March 2019. All presidential addresses were collected from the *Official Website of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan - Elbasy Nursultan Nazarbayev* - <https://elbasy.kz/en> and *Official Site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan* - <http://www.akorda.kz/en>.

Table 1

Selected data in multiple languages

	Title	Date	Author	Length	Language
Presidential Speeches	To renovated Kazakhstan-through in-depth reforms and nationwide concord (Nazarbayev's speech at the session of the Supreme Soviet)	6/9/94	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	61 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 1997	10/16/97	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	40 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 1998		Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	15 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 1999	9/19/99	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	6 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 2000	10/16/00	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	14 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 2001	9/16/01	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president		Russian
	Message from the president 2002	4/16/02	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	12 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 2003	4/16/03	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	16 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 2004	3/19/04	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	26 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 2005	2/16/05	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	23 pages	Russian

	Message from the president 2006	3/1/06	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	23 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 2007	2/28/07	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	40 pages	Kazakh
	Message from the president 2008	2/16/08	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	18 pages	Kazakh
	Message from the president 2009	3/6/09	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	15 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 2010	1/29/10	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	23 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 2011	1/28/11	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	18 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 2012	1/27/10	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	18 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 2012	12/14/12	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	53 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 2014	1/18/14	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	13 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 2015		Nursultan Nazarbayev - president		Russian
	Message from the president 2016		Nursultan Nazarbayev - president		Russian
	Message from the president 2017	1/31/17	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	16 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 2018	10/5/18	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	19 pages	Russian
	Message from the president 2019	9/2/19	Kassym Jomart Tokayev - president	25 pages	Russian
Strategic Plans	A strategy for the Development of Kazakhstan as a Sovereign State	2/14/94]	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	63 pages	English
	Strategy Kazakhstan 2050	12/15/12	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	17 pages	English

Laws	Strategy Kazakhstan 2030	10/16/97	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	49 pages	English
	State program of education development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020	10/7/10	Ministry of Education and Science	55 pages	English
	Law on Higher Education 1993	4/10/93	Ministry of Education and Science	7 pages	Russian
	Law on Privatization 1995	12/25/95	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	4 pages	Russian
	Law on Education 2007	7/27/07	Nursultan Nazarbayev - president	31 pages	Russian/English

In her research, Hughes (2009) analyzed President Bush's speeches using grounded theory and discussed how presidents set the public agenda and influenced legislation via their addresses. An important factor, "the popularity of the president, plays an important role in determining the president's success in focusing attention on certain policy issues" (p.7).

I also included President Nazarbayev's book, *To Renovated Kazakhstan-Through In-depth Reforms and Nationwide Concord* (Nazarbayev's speech at the session of the Supreme Soviet), 1993. However, since I follow the basic premise of theoretical sampling, I chose data based on discovering more about emerging categories or properties and not based on increasing representativeness or generalizability. I moved forward with data collection based on data analysis to advance my understanding of emergent concepts.

To tackle my third research question about the conceptualization of neoliberal educational policies in official and public documents, I used (a) *Law on Higher Education 1993*, (b) *Law on Education 2007*, (c) *World Bank (WB) OECD reports*, and (d) *Asian Development Bank (ADB)- country reports* (see Table 2). The analysis of WB and ADB reports is also essential to examine their contribution to the introduction of neoliberal policies in higher

education in Kazakhstan. The WB and ASD are the “strongest powers that coordinate educational development initiatives” in Kazakhstan (Adhikary, 2012). As the world’s major financial institutions, WB and ADB have provided multiple loans to reform higher education in Kazakhstan since independence.

Table 2

Data selected and data collected.

Documents selected	Author of the document	Target audience	Data collected
Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education” 1992	Ministry of Education and Science (MES)	General public	The establishment of a private sector in higher education in Kazakhstan
Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Higher Education” 1993	MES	General public	The establishment of a private sector in higher education in Kazakhstan. Higher education legislation.
Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education” 2007	MES	General public	Decentralization. Private-public partnership. Triangulation State merit-based aid.
The Strategy Kazakhstan - 2050	Nursultan Nazarbayev	General public	Transition to a market system. Knowledge-based economy development. Higher education reforms based on neoliberalism’s core principles.
Nazarbayev University Strategic Plan	Nazarbayev University	Nazarbayev University administration,	Nationalism and neoliberalism. State merit-based scholarships. Shared governance

		faculty members, students, parents, and other stakeholders	
OECD report - Higher Education in Kazakhstan 2007 and 2017	The World Bank OECD	International partners, general public.	Decentralization. Transitional period. Higher education finance. Private universities. Elite education. Meritocracy. Bolashak scholarship, Nazarbayev University, and Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools.

Data Analysis

In my study, I applied the combination of deductive and inductive analysis of the text. As I conducted a comprehensive literature review in my program's early stage, I developed a codebook with relevant codes, synonyms, and antonyms. I utilized my codebook to find and further develop research themes.

However, the bulk of my coding process was dedicated to applying inductive reasoning to my study. Grounded theory coding "requires us to stop and ask analytic questions of the data we have gathered" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). I intended to follow the inductive coding techniques developed and articulated by Charmaz (2006) in her book, called *Constructivist Grounded Theory* (see table 3). According to the author of this book, it is essential to begin from "initial coding," which refers to the close examination of fragments of data. The goal of initial coding, particularly for grounded theory studies, is "to remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by your readings of the data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46).

Table 3

Coding strategies (Adapted from Bennet, 2016)

Author	Beginning	Middle	Final
Charmaz (2006)	Initial coding	Focused coding, Axial coding (optional)	Theoretical coding

After conducting comprehensive initial or open coding, I was engaged in axial coding, in which I selected what I believe are essential codes from the initial coding. According to Charmaz (2006), “the purposes of axial coding are to sort, synthesize, and organize large amounts of data and reassemble them in new ways after open coding” (p. 60) Throughout the coding process, I kept comparing data with data, and then data with codes. This technique relates to constant comparison, a valuable coding attribute of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The final stage of the coding process is theoretical coding, where a theory of the studied phenomena occurred. Charmaz (2006) underscored that “theoretical codes conceptualize how the axial codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into theory” (p. 75).

Data Integrity

In grounded theory data, integrity is achieved through theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is the procedure by which I jointly collect and analyze data and decide which data to collect next and where to develop the theory as it emerged (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, theoretical sampling constituted an inductive and iterative process that abstained from using preconceived concepts as a theoretical framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Data hold latent patterns, and data can be used in any way and in any combination (Glaser, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, according to theoretical sampling, data must earn their way into the analysis based on preliminary hypotheses emerging during the process of generating the theory. This theoretical sampling process was performed in the selective and theoretical phase of the data and analysis process to saturate the emerging theory. I finished collecting additional data until I reach data saturation.

Pilot Study

I conducted the initial In Vivo coding of three documents: (a) *Message from the President* -- a speech of Nursultan Nazarbayev dated September 30th, 1998 (5888 words, 12 pages); (b) an excerpt from Nazarbayev University Strategic plan 2018-2030 dated December 1st, 2018 (2235 words, 5 pages); and (c) Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education” dated July 27, 2007 (3159 words, 10 pages). After the initial line-by-line coding, I came up with approximately 210 inductive codes from three documents. The generation of initial line-by-line coding was accompanied by analytical memo writing. As Saldana (2009) articulated, “memos are sites of conversation with us with your data” (p. 32). The initial coding picture gave me a general overview and understanding of the current pieces of data.

After generating over 210 codes, I conducted axial coding together with constant comparison analysis. As I am interested in utilizing an entire dataset to identify underlying themes presented through the data, constant comparison analysis is essential. I compared my emerging codes with data, data with data, and codes with codes. I undertook constant comparison analysis deductively by applying codes identified before analysis and then looked for in the data and inductively. After all the data have been coded, the codes are grouped by similarity, and a theme is identified and documented based on each grouping.

Preliminary Findings

In my initial data analysis (pilot study), I found that codes, such as “privatization” (private; privacy), “human capital,” “competition” (compete, competitive), and “knowledge economy,” I developed during the literature review were not common throughout all three data sources. The first deductive investigation did not give sensible discoveries to concentrate on. At the same time, the line-by-line inductive examination of the current data sources passed on me more thoughts for additional exploration courses. To be explicit, it was found that neoliberalism in Kazakhstan had some peculiarities and paradoxes, as follows: (a) government regulations; (b) intellectual giftedness/meritocracy; and (c) individualism.

Government Regulations

Neoliberalism refers to the doctrine of protecting private property rights through decreased interference by the state (Harvey, 2005; Steger & Roy, 2010). In other words, in the neoliberal state the government involvement should be as minimal as possible. The review of the previous research above has shown the Kazakhstani government's intention to limit state interference following the unregulated market's core principles. However, as the initial analysis of current data demonstrated, the Kazakhstan government, represented by the first president, was actively engaged in every industry, including education. In Nazarbayev University's strategic plan, the government's active participation was described by the fulfillment of President Nazarbayev's vision for the university would strengthen the links between teaching, research, innovation and eventual commercialization so that they become seamless. This transformation will be fundamental to fulfilling the vision that President Nazarbayev has for NU.” (NU Strategy, 2018-2030, p. 13)

In the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “On Education,” the government's active involvement is articulated by distributing scholarship and grants treated by President

Nazarbayev:

the “Bolashak” international scholarship is the grant established by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan to provide teaching of the citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the leading foreign institutions of higher education on a full-time course in the foreign organizations (Law “On Education 2007, p. 2)

or/and

the educational grant of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Leader of the Nation of Orken - the grant established by the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan for payment of training of intellectually gifted children in specialized organizations “Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools” (Law on Education 2007, p. 2)

This finding can be explained by the past political framework in Kazakhstan during communism. In the centrally planned economy in the USSR, students in Kazakhstan were assigned which university to attend and what profession to obtain (Maksutova, 2012). In the current “neoliberal” times, the Kazakh government maintains active participation in higher education by targeting certain professions, student populations, and educational programs to meet the needs of a market economy. The administration's dynamic investment is likewise connected with an aid based on merits. As such, students with specific scholarly capacities are required for the nation to succeed, and the administration is willing to reward them. Moreover, it is assumed that Kazakhstan has created a market-based system that is strongly tied to the leader of the country.

Intellectual Giftedness/Meritocracy

Neoliberal meritocracy has been heavily criticized by scholars (Saunders, 2007; 2013). In the literature that was previously analyzed, intellectual competitiveness has been

considered as a part of neoliberalism. In the current data, *the intellectual giftedness* of Kazakh people is a major attribute of a successful implementation of a free-market society. It is found that the majority of social and educational projects and reforms target intellectually gifted students and the general Kazakh population. In his speech, the president stated:

Fellow countrymen and women of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the
the program that I set forth today didn't appear in one day or by chance. It is
transformation to more open, a more competitive, and more honest society

(Address of the President Nazarbayev to the People of Kazakhstan, 1998, p. 13)

In the strategic plan of NU, an idea about intellectual giftedness has broadened. In reality, NU positions itself as a major educational hub for poor, but intellectually talented students.

NU attracts the best minds and talents in the country, NU functions.
as a social lift for poor, but talented young people; the wider
society embraces the NU model (NU Strategy, 2018-2030, p. 17)

All the above endeavors, statements, and provisions are fixed by law, as in the third data source, there is a strong emphasis on intellectual giftedness and its reward.

Individualism

One of the core attributes of neoliberalism is creating rational and self-interest individuals and a strong emphasis on individual rights. Historically, Kazakhstan has been a community-based, family-bounded, collective society. However, after the introduction of a market system, the implementation of the modern individualistic citizenry was the major appeal of Nazarbayev's speech. "Collectivism responsibility equals no responsibility. Collective

responsibility is the enemy of accountability” (Address of the President Nazarbayev to the People of Kazakhstan, 1998, p. 7)

In the other source of data, individualism was emphasized via the creation of an individual approach to education, “the specialized study is the process of differentiation and individualization of study, organization of educational process taking into account interests, tendencies and abilities of students” (Law “On Education” 2007, p. 1)

After conducting an initial pilot study by analyzing three different data sources, I conclude that some findings reflect a consensus in critical policy scholarship as to the impact of neoliberalism on higher education in Kazakhstan. However, I equally found that some theoretical categories contradicted the literature review. Since the grounded theory is also called “hypothesis-generating research”, the preliminary findings of the pilot study can serve as a basis for generating initial hypotheses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 68). As the previous research in the area of neoliberalism has demonstrated, the role of the government ought to be minimized. Nevertheless, as I found in the current data analysis, in the present “neoliberal” times, the Kazakh government maintains active participation in higher education. Kazakh government’s active participation in higher education can be explained by the centrally planned economy when Kazakhstan was part of the USSR.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter exhibits a comprehensive approach to understanding neoliberalism to reveal the methods in which neoliberalism has influenced the post-communist education reforms in Kazakhstan. It features how various forms of neoliberalism operate together to impact education reform policy initiatives and action plans initiated and promoted by the political leaders of this post-communist Central Asian country and features how neoliberalism helps legitimize and advance the development of a neoliberal capitalistic order in Kazakhstan. Understanding the neoliberal changes in Kazakhstan is done by applying grounded theory research methodology to analyze education policy documents and presidential speeches.

In grounded theory research, as in other qualitative inquiry forms, the investigator is the primary data collection instrument and analysis (Charmaz, 2006). As such, the researcher/analyst reposts trust in skills and intuition and filters data through an interpretive lens. As researcher/analyst, I extracted and analyzed data from numerous education policy documents and several selected speeches and writings as part of theoretical sampling—that is, “sampling based on concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 176). I examined line, phrase, sentence, and paragraph sections from the documents and other sources to codify the data. The initial encoding of the content of the data was based on two groups of search terms: (1) higher education and market economy, (2) and the core principles of neoliberalism (privatization, competition, individualism, entrepreneurship, and so forth)

The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) guided the data analysis based on an inductive approach geared to identifying patterns and discovering the data's theoretical properties. In a back-and-forth interaction with the data, I frequently checked and

rechecked the elemental codes and concepts. I scrutinized and compared data with data and codes to organize ideas and pinpoint images that seemed to cluster together. Codes were clustered into substantive categories. These category codes were compared across speeches of the Republic of Kazakhstan's former and current presidents, social media posts of the current minister of education and science, and data from other documents. I compared coded segments by asking, "How is this text like, or different from, the preceding text?" and "What kinds of ideas are mentioned in both speech statements and documents?". Hence, I identified similarities, differences, and general patterns (Bowen, 2008, p. 144). If the new data suggested new categories, then the previous transcripts of speeches, together with data from other documents, were reanalyzed to determine the presence of those categories. By doing so, I filled in underdeveloped categories and narrowed excess ones.

NVivo software program has significantly assisted and eased the coding process. It took me a great deal of time to advance my skills to work productively in NVivo. I collected my data and imported it to NVivo, and I categorized them according to their origins. The first category: Messages of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan from 1994-2019. This category preceded strategic plans: (a) the Strategy Kazakhstan - 2030; (b) the Strategy Kazakhstan - 2050; (c) Nazarbayev University Strategic Plan. I also have a separate section for policy documents (see Table 3): (a) Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan - 1993; (b) Law on Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan - 2007; (c) The Program of Education Development 2011-2020; (d) 100 Steps towards Innovative Kazakhstan; (e) OECD reports 2007 and 2017; (f) Nazarbayev University Strategic plan 2018-2030; (g) Asian Development Bank country report 2010; (h) Education Policy Outlook Kazakhstan 2018; (i)

National Report in the state and development of the educational system of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2015;

The first research question is about changes in the higher educational system after the introduction of neoliberal policies. In the current dissertation section, I will discuss research findings concerning the changes in the design of higher education in Kazakhstan influenced by neoliberalism. The first three documents that came under scrutiny were: (a) *Law on Higher Education 1993* (7 pages), (b) *Law on Education 1999* (23 pages), and (c) *Law on Education 2007* (57 pages). The Laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Education" are based on the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Education" and defines the principles of state policy in the field of higher education, establishes the legal, economic, and social foundations of the organization and activities of higher education institutions, aims at creating conditions for citizens to exercise their constitutional rights to higher education, regulates relations between subjects of the educational process, establishes their rights and obligations, competence, and responsibility.

All three documents were written in Russian. I read papers in Russian, and I used English words to code the relevant themes in them. Law on education accessed records (a), (b), and (c) via the official website of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. All three documents were signed by the former president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Decentralization

Following the pronouncement of Kazakhstan's independence in 1991, the republic immediately set about reforming its education policy. One of the primary tasks was to eliminate the old Soviet system and heritage and implement transformational reforms to meet new Western standards. Although the Soviet system of higher education was one of the most competitive back

then, the Kazakhstani government officials had to accept neoliberal educational standard packages under Western capitalist states' pressure. As Silova (2009) indicated, former Soviet republics were "driven by a strong desire to join the Western educational concepts such as "democracy, 'pluralism," and "multiculturalism" (p.75).

Neoliberal educational reforms can be conceptualized as occurring in four distinct stages (see Table 4): the first stage (1991-1994) focused mainly on forming a legislative basis for higher education. This stage's most fundamental tasks were making a powerful organization of higher education establishments and adjusting courses of study to give the essential abilities and preparing for a changing work market. In 1993, Kazakhstan's Law "On higher education" laid the basis for achieving these assignments. In 1994, Kazakhstan endorsed a state standard on higher education, which presented a lone wolf's expert level to the republic.

The subsequent stage (1995-1998) included dynamic measures to modernize Kazakhstan's higher education framework. These initiatives included the development of a new list of 342 specialties and the promotion of private higher education institutions. In Kazakhstan, there are currently 66 private higher education institutions. The third stage (1999-2000) was marked by decentralization of education management and funding, as well as an expansion of educational institutions' academic freedom. In June 1999, the republic received another law— additionally named "On Education"— just as a "model for the development of a student society in foundations of higher education." The purpose of the new model was the introduction of national entrance tests for applicants in all specialties, administered by an autonomous and competent organ.

The fourth phase of Kazakhstan's higher education change has been in the measure since 2001. The final stage concentrated on the strategic advancement of higher education. This time is

marked by the introduction of a three-stage educational approach, with bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and doctoral degrees. The establishment of a national education quality assessment framework is another notable feature. In 2011, Kazakhstan turned into a signatory to the European Advanced Education Region (the Bologna Process). The "State Program on Advancement of Schooling from 2011-2020" (the "State Training System") spreads out a few estimates that will align the republic with the suggested boundaries of the Bologna Process.

Table 4

Different stages of neoliberal education reforms in Kazakhstan

First stage 1991-1994	Second stage 1995-1998	Third stage 1999-2000	Fourth stage 2001-present
Higher education legislative and regulatory legal base formation. Higher educational institutions network and higher education specialties updating were the main objectives of this stage.	The beginning of modernization of the higher education system.	Decentralization of management and financing of education, expansion of academic freedom in higher education.	Strategic development of a higher professional education system. Basic directions of higher professional education have been identified.

The central government-controlled education in the former USSR. Students were assigned what courses and jobs to take after graduation. The government appointed a prescribed curriculum that was followed at all universities. For example, a Soviet student enrolled in a geography major at one institution would take the same classes at another school. Also, the central government dictated how subjects were taught at the institutions of higher education. The

central government was responsible for allocating funds and controlling educational policies in all Soviet republics, including Kazakhstan. The power and control over higher education institutions in the entire USSR belonged to the central government, to the Ministry of Higher Education of the USSR.

The first years of independence were characterized by the exterminating of the soviet legacy in higher education to embrace neoliberalism, which exited higher education's centralized system. One of the core principles of neoliberalism is limited or minimal state interference. The current neoliberal core idea has triggered and laid the foundation for executing the policies of higher education decentralization in Kazakhstan after independence. Higher education decentralization was a result of political and economic democratization policies. Education management in the country began to acquire a complex, ramified structure. Independent governing bodies for higher and secondary education have appeared, both at the union and republican levels. The ministries were the first in a string of measures to reorganize the education management system:

Since independence, the Republic of Kazakhstan is creating the new legal base of the education system. The two main laws regulating education in the country are the Law on Education of 7 July 1992 and the Law on Higher Education of 1993. These laws determine the State educational policy, the objectives and principles of education, the administrative structure, and the system of private schools. They also ratify the democratic character of the education system and the administrative and financial decentralization of educational institutions, and they guarantee the autonomy of academic institutions, colleges and secondary schools. (World Data on Education).

The primary incentive to initiate decentralization and democratization of universities in Kazakhstan have been a historically centralized government approach. New policy changes allowed the strengthening of the role of different governing agencies, including local executive bodies.

Limited flexibility at schools in the use of available resources, and inadequate authority and mechanisms to apply locally suitable decisions on instruction, and pedagogical and school management indicate a continued centralized approach. The basis of decentralization has been established, but the roles of agencies at different levels need to be clarified and capacities strengthened significantly. The role of MOES to coordinate and lead the system is particularly critical. A comprehensive and effective education management information system, although evolving, requires substantial support to generate reliable and internationally comparable statistics, and to support participation of a range of stakeholders in decentralized management, decision making, and monitoring. Management of schools and key institutions (rayon, oblast, training institutions) needs to be improved. (Asian Development Bank report, p. 2).

Shared Governance

With the introduction of a new market system and the eradication of a planned economy, the role of the Ministry of Education of Science (MES) of Kazakhstan changed dramatically after the 2000s. The management style of MES has transformed as multiple national education reforms started being introduced to promote the idea of shared governance. Before introducing the market economy, the MES was a single governmental body that provided total control over the institutions of higher education. However, with the implementation of new reforms in higher education, total control over the system was changed to “monitoring” instead of “total control.” In the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education,” in Chapter 2 – Management of the higher education system, Article 4 – Competence of the government of Kazakhstan in education that was signed and accepted by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev in 2007 stated,

forms a system of continuous monitoring of the current and prospective needs of the labor market in person” and “ensures the participation of social partners in solving the problems of vocational education and approves the state educational order for training with higher or postgraduate education for three years, as well as with technical and professional, post-secondary education in education organizations funded from the national budget (with the exception of education organizations providing training for the Armed Forces, other troops and military

formations, as well as special state bodies) taking into account the needs of the labor market, taking into account the needs of the labor market (Nazarbayev, 2007, p. 24)

From power being exercised by solely a single governmental body, the new market system, established after political independence, enabled creating a private sector in the higher education system. The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Higher Education” in 1993 allowed the establishment of non-state universities. According to this document, one of the important principles of state policy in the field of higher education is “promoting the private system of higher education” (Law “On Higher Education,” 1993, sanction I, Article 3). Only two types of educational organizations could legally operate in Kazakhstan from 1991 to 2000: these stated organizational foundations and private.

As I analyzed my first pieces of data, I found that a theme, “a transfer of power” or “a shift of power,” was quite widespread throughout all three documents. Although in Document A, the shift of power was not discussed concerning higher education, I indicated my initial codes. When it comes to Document B, ideas about the transfer of power from a single governmental body were delivered in accordance with decentralization. In Document B, it was discussed that one of the main principles of the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan is “promoting decentralization of higher education management, providing for the redistribution of functions and powers between governing bodies at all levels with the expansion of the rights of universities” (The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Higher Education,” 1993, Section I, Article 3). Neoliberal policies have resulted in the transfer of power and control from the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan to other legal entities, organizations, and groups, including domestic and international.

Board of Trustees

The neoliberal type of management shifts the locus of control from a state to citizens with significant capital. Neoliberalism places the power of decision-making in the hands of the wealthy capitalist bourgeoisie. As such, neoliberal management structure, which often benefits the upper-middle class, is reflected in the transformation of higher education in Kazakhstan after transitioning to a market-based political and economic system. In particular, the introduction of the board of trustees as a part of the governing body at major public and private universities in Kazakhstan has been provided significant power, wealth, and control to the country's political leaders, entrepreneurs, and oil tycoons.

Governing boards (also known as boards of trustees, supervisory boards or boards of directors) were established in 2007 to support higher education institutions. Initially these bodies had no formal governance authority but represented a first step towards building a non-governmental body to advise higher education institutions. Additional guidelines established in 2012, 2015 and 2016 granted boards of trustees' responsibility over the allocation of sponsorships, charitable assistance, and funds received from non-government sources, including the allocation of any net income the state permits an institution to retain, as well as more authority over the appointment of university rectors (during 2016-18, a total of 19 rectors of state universities were elected by boards of trustees on the basis of competitive selection).

Boards of trustees may make proposals to the ministry on the participation of the state-owned institutions in other legal entities and on "other substantive matters". According to MESRK guidelines, boards are to be composed of education institutions stakeholders, employers and social partners, representatives of public organizations and foundations and sponsors. In 2018, over half of the universities in Kazakhstan (92 of 130) had established governing boards, and 28 state-owned universities had boards of trustees (OECD report, 2017, p. 155)

Significant alterations in the system of higher in Kazakhstan occurred in the 2000s. The expansion of university autonomy in terms of governance was granted to several state national universities, which were historically centrally governed for decades. In 2001, with the Republic of Kazakhstan's former president's decree, seven higher education institutions were awarded special status. Special status and the expansion of autonomy meant,

- the creation of a trustee and supervisory board in universities.
 - financial and personnel independence.
 - international partnership expansion.
 - diversification of the financial resources and the attraction of investment for the development of universities.
 - academic freedom in the formation of educational programs.
 - the election of university presidents and rectors.
- (bill “On the introduction of changes and additions in some legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan expansion issues academic and management independence higher education institutions).

With the private sector’s existence, control over public and non-state universities transferred into their founders’ hands, distinct political leaders and business elites from Kazakhstan and other countries. The law “On Education”-2007 allowed to significantly expand the collegiate council’s powers in the forms of trustees, science council, and faculty unions. The collegiate committees became essential allies in the decision-making process at the institutions of higher education. The representatives of various industries and key political and business leaders become the members of the boards. Importantly, in Document C, it was indicated that “the collegiate body of the state organization of technical and vocational education, according to the agreement, includes a representative of the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of the Republic of Kazakhstan” (the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education, 2007, Article 44). Moreover, in the State Program of Education Development 2011-2020, which was adopted in 2011, it was stated that “the role of the boards of trustees in schools will be increased due to involvement of parents, employers, non-governmental organizations in the education sector and professional associations in paying for the education.” (see Table 5.)

Table 5

Percentage of board of trustees at higher education institutions in Kazakhstan

Indicators	2010	2015	2020
Boards of trustees established in educational institutions	40%	60%	60%

For example, since its inception, Nazarbayev University was one of the first higher education institutions in Kazakhstan to introduce shared governance by establishing the Supreme Board of Trustees. The members of this highest governance body at Nazarbayev University are nationally and internationally well-known political and business leaders. The First Chair of the Supreme Board of Trustees: “Nursultan Nazarbayev – the first President of the Republic of Kazakhstan – Elbasy; members of the Supreme Board of Trustees: Askar Main – Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Yerbolat Dossayev – Chairman of the National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Alikhan Smailov – First Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan – Minister of Finance of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Gulshara Abdykhalikova – the Governor of Kyzylorda region; Karim Massimov – Chairman of the National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Kulyash Shamshidinova – Chairperson of the Management Board AEO “Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools”; Shigeo Katsu – President of Nazarbayev University; Asset Issekeshov – Aide of the President – Secretary of the security council of the Republic of Kazakhstan” (Nazarbayev University website, 2020).

According to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan about “Nazarbayev University” status, the competence of the university’s board of trustees includes,

- 1) approval of annual and medium-term budgets.

2) determination of the quantitative composition of the executive bodies of the University, Intellectual Schools and the Fund, election of their leaders and members or persons solely performing the functions of the executive body, as well as early termination of their powers.

3) approval of the rules for the procurement of goods, works, services.

4) other powers in accordance with this Law, the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the charters of the University, Intellectual Schools, and the Fund.

6) The Board of Trustees of the University and the Intellectual Schools includes representatives of the founder, teachers and researchers, representatives of public associations and other persons. Civil servants participate in the management of the University, the Intellectual Schools, and the Foundation when they are appointed to the governing bodies of these legal entities.

7) The management of the current activities of the University, Intellectual Schools and the Fund is carried out by their executive bodies. The executive bodies can be collegial or sole.

The executive bodies of the University, the Intellectual Schools, and the Fund act based on and in pursuance of the decisions of the Supreme Board of Trustees, the Board of Trustees of the University, Intellectual Schools, the Fund and are accountable to them.

The structure, competence, procedure for the formation and terms of office of the executive bodies of the University, the Intellectual Schools and the Fund are determined by their charters. (Law on the Status of Nazarbayev University and Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, 2011, Article 6, part 5).

Institutional Autonomy. A shift of power from a single governing body was one of the subjects in the document titled 100 Concrete Steps Toward a New Nation. In step 78, the former president underscored that “academic freedom shall be gradually reinforced moving towards the self-management of universities, considering the Nazarbayev University’s experience.

Transformation of private universities into non-profit organizations in line with international practice”(100 Concrete steps toward a new nation, step 78). Since 2000, the government has taken necessary steps towards the devolution of power from the MES to higher education institutions.

The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development conducted a comprehensive analysis of Kazakhstan's higher education system and provided a rigorous report in 2017. In this report, the OECD researchers delivered the same message with regards to the shift of power. In this document, the researchers pointed out that "supervisory boards have been established at some institutions; the degree of required adherence to state standards for curriculum design has been reduced (especially at National Research Universities), and the National Accreditation Center has been replaced by the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility Centers."

Although the theme of shared governance was well documented in most of my data as a positive direction for higher education transformation, in the OECD – 2017 report, it was found that university administrators were willing to reach full autonomy. Despite the positive progress that was documented in other data sources, in the OECD – 2017 report, it was stated,

the devolution of control has been slow due to regulatory constraints that are linked to issues of funding and governance as well as to perceived gaps in institutions' capacity to assume full responsibility for curriculum and programme design. For example, plans made in 2010, which would have given full autonomy to the National Research Universities and replaced state attestation by 2015, have not been realized. As was reported to the OECD review team during the meetings with senior university administrators, higher education institutions would like to acquire full autonomy. (OECD report, 2017, p. 145)

Budget Control. Despite active decentralization policies of higher education governance in Kazakhstan, the financial aspect is still highly centralized. As so, universities in Kazakhstan, public and private, obtain funding from the government in student merit-based government aid. The allocation of state grants to students is an obvious demonstration of neoliberal ideology. Specifically, students must compete on the national level to obtain state grants. At the same time, universities must fight to attract students with government money as state merit-aid scholarships

are the primary funding option for public universities. As a result, public universities strongly rely on the Ministry of Education and Science,

the government has taken steps towards the devolution of power from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MESRK) to higher education institutions. For example, supervisory boards have been established at some institutions; the degree of required adherence to state standards for curriculum design has been reduced (especially at National Research Universities); and the National Accreditation Center has been replaced by the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility Center. However, the devolution of control has been slow due to regulatory constraints that are linked to issues of funding and governance (OECD report, 2017, p.45)

At public universities, the Ministry of Education and Science is still a significant source of funding. All staff at public universities get their salaries from the government. After 2011, policymakers in Kazakhstan initiated a new funding scheme, similar to the US's metric-based funding. In this regard, the Ministry of Education and Science gives the presence to the universities that conduct research. Specifically, "the Law on Science in 2011 and the State Programme of Education Development for 2011-2020 introduced two new designations for selected higher education institutions – "research university" and "national research university". These institutions enjoy access to enhanced funding for research and they are expected to integrate teaching, learning and research at all levels of study" (OECD report, 2017, p. 145).

Private universities, on the other hand, attract a smaller proportion of students with government education grants. Therefore, private schools heavily rely on students who pay university tuition out of their pocket. As a result, private universities in Kazakhstan have exercised comparatively higher autonomy and freedom in terms of curriculum, governance, acceptance criteria, availability of majors, etc.

Stagnation

Since the transition to an economy based upon privatization, competition, skills, and knowledge, higher education policymakers have introduced and implemented numerous reforms. Some of them have been effective, some of them have been delayed for multiple reasons. In particular, in the OECD recent report, it was indicated that there was a possibility that universities in Kazakhstan were unprepared to obtain full autonomy from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Full independence was especially problematic for private universities in Kazakhstan as there are societal concerns related to institutional accountability. There are extreme institutional corruption issues as many students reported bribes and unnecessary fees for accommodation and examination. These problems negatively affect decentralization reforms, including full institutional autonomy and financial independence.

The slow rate of progress towards greater institutional autonomy also suggests a real degree of ambivalence – especially among administrators and members of the public. For instance, some of the government officials interviewed by the OECD review team questioned whether higher education in Kazakhstan is in fact prepared for more autonomy. Concerns about the expansion of autonomy may partly be explained by the continuing need to address a set of problems that arose after the rapid and largely uncontrolled growth of private higher education provision that began in the early 1990s. In this regard, and as noted elsewhere in this review, the MESRK has taken steps to optimize the system and to assure the quality of provision.

Discomfort about institutional autonomy may also be linked in part to societal concerns about institutional accountability. These are evidenced for instance in public unease about corruption occurring at higher education institutions. Students surveyed in the late spring of 2014 reported that bribes are routinely required for the purchase of course assignments, examination results and access to dormitories. This survey led senior officials to call for stringent anti-corruption measures aimed at corrupt university managers (OECD report, 2017, pp. 259-260).

Bologna Process

In 2010 Kazakhstan joined Bologna membership to become the 47th member. Bologna's membership has expanded the decentralization by providing universities greater autonomy in

designing the subjects' content. As an implementation of new policies intended to introduce decentralization, state universities in Kazakhstan have expanded their institutional autonomy in terms of course content design.

Bologna process, in which Kazakhstan participates since 2010 pays specific attention to autonomy of universities. Kazakhstani universities have an academic freedom in designing content: in bachelor programs up to 55%, in master programs - 70% and in PhD programs - 90%(National report on the state and development of educational system of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015, p. 89).

Special Status of Nazarbayev University

An example of full institutional autonomy has been Nazarbayev University, an international university with western partners. In 2010 Nazarbayev University was established, and in 2011, it changed its jurisdictional status. Nazarbayev University received special jurisdictional status, which allowed complete institutional and academic freedom, and freedom from government interference. In this regard, the university has been operating according to its own educational standards, which are not administered by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The activities of the university are regulated by a particular law of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Important in this regard was the passage of a special law giving NU academic and institutional autonomy. In turn, this autonomy allowed NU to aggressively pursue global governance standards and merit-based admissions and hiring policies. It also allowed the creation of a Board of Trustees with international and national members; (Nazarbayev University strategic plan 2018-2030, p. 20).

Academic Freedom. Transition to a market-system has substantially expanded academic freedom in the institutions of higher education in Kazakhstan. The Republic of Kazakhstan's

former president paid special attention to this subject and concluded that “We need to start a gradual transition of our leading universities to academic and administrative autonomy. I believe it necessary to establish an effective system of student support for high performers.”

(Nazarbayev speech, 2016).

Currently the universities of Kazakhstan enjoy more academic freedom in defining the content of educational programs: the number of electives has been raised from 40% to 50% - in undergraduate system, from 50% to 60% - in graduate system, and from 70% to 80% - for PhD. (State Education Development Program 2011-2020).

Different Types of Universities. In 2007, an updated and edited law, “On Education” was introduced. This law played a vital role in the transfer of power and the dependence of Kazakhstani universities from the MES. New types of universities were introduced with the description of their legal forms (See table 1.2) As I mentioned earlier in the dissertation with the appointment of Kasym Jomart-Tokayev and Askhat Aitmagambetov, who received his Ph.D. in the US, as a secretary of education, the mission of expanding institutional autonomy and transferring power and control from the MES to individual universities has been speeded up. As I was writing this dissertation, Askhat Aitmagambetov, current secretary of education, grouped all universities in Kazakhstan into three categories. Each group of universities has various degrees of institutional autonomy (see Table 6). The major emphasis in differentiating universities is given to the level of research development, as such, different types of universities are also differentiated in the funding opportunities. Earlier in this dissertation, I have mentioned that universities with strong research foundations have more opportunities to obtain state financial appropriations.

Table 6

Types of public universities and their descriptions

Types of universities/ Legal Form of University	Description based on Law “On Education” – 2007
National Research University	Higher education institution with special status with five-year development programmed approved by the Government of Kazakhstan. This type of university implements self-designed educational higher and postgraduate education programmed on the broad range of training areas (specialties) that use results of fundamental and applied scientific research to generate and transfer new knowledge;
National Institution of Higher Education	An educational institution that is a leading academic and the country’s methodical center, which has a special status
Research University	Higher education institution with special status with five-year development programmed approved by the Government of Kazakhstan. This type of university implements self-designed educational higher and postgraduate education programmed on the broad range of training areas (specialties) that use results of fundamental and applied scientific research to generate and transfer new knowledge;

The Selection of Rectors at National Universities.

In the initial data analysis process, I acquired some concepts that had demanded closer scrutiny. To be specific, the idea of creating a board of trustees at Kazakhstan's top national universities. When I started gathering literature for my research, the President, who governed the state since 1991, decided to resign in March 2019. As his successor, he appointed the Head of the Senate of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kasym-Jomart Tokayev, to take office as an interim

president of the Republic Kazakhstan until June 2019. Tokayev became officially elected President after the presidential elections in June 2019. Unexpectedly, due to the governing leadership changes, I have decided to include decrees concerning a newly elected Kazakhstan president's higher education. One of the first of his decrees that I also include in my analysis was the changes in rectors of national universities' appointment.

Currently, virtually all public institutions have a board of trustees (Bilyalov, 2016). The board of trustees functioned as a nominal governing body that only by-laws could suggest, advise, and discuss policies at the institutional level. University rectors exercised more power and decision-making control than the board of trustees. Until recently, rectors at all public universities in Kazakhstan were appointed by the MES and at 11 national universities by the President of Kazakhstan. In the Law on Education 2007, article 4, Rectors, in turn, reported directly to the MES. Nevertheless, in 2019 Nazarbayev's successor, President Kasym-Jomart Tokayev, signed a decree on revising the appointment of rectors of national universities. On August 20, 2019, the current head of the MES published a Facebook post in response to the President's new decree. Askhat Aitmagambetov, the Head of the MES,

By decree of the Head of State, the procedure for appointing rectors of national universities has changed. I consider this a significant event and an important decision. And that's why. Since 2008, the rectors of 11 national universities have been appointed by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. At that time, this decision was dictated by the fact that these large educational institutions needed to provide managerial and academic independence. Following the example of the activities of Nazarbayev University, the intention was that the Ministry should not directly intervene in the operational work of these universities. Such a policy has yielded results. But, at the same time, the lack of competition and the status of "Presidential appointee" do not have a positive impact on the development of these educational institutions. Moreover, last year with the adoption of the 3 Law on managerial and academic autonomy, all universities received additional powers and autonomy. Therefore, the Head of State decided that from 2019, rectors of national universities will be appointed on a competitive basis. What positive results will we get in connection with this decision? Firstly, an open competition. At this stage, anyone

who meets the requirements of the candidate for the post of rector can submit his application for the competition. Secondly, transparency. All candidates will be interviewed at the Supervisory Board of the relevant university. Thirdly, this is a competition of programs and competition. Further, the republican commission will consider draft university development programs submitted by candidates. Fourth, it is a responsibility to society. Of course, the instructions of the Head of State will be implemented by us. We will make every effort to ensure transparency and competition in ongoing competitions” (Aitmagambetov, 2019).

Accreditation

Accreditation is a process by which an accreditation body assesses the quality of the university as a whole or of individual educational programs of the university in order to recognize their compliance with certain standards and criteria. Accreditation is divided into institutional and specialized, as well as national and international.

Institutional accreditation is the accreditation of an educational organization as a whole.

Specialized accreditation is the accreditation of individual educational programs of the university. National accreditation - accreditation of an educational organization or educational program by an accreditation agency within the country.

International accreditation - accreditation of an educational program by a foreign accreditation agency. (Law on Education, 2007)

Independent accreditation is carried out in accordance with the State Program for the Development of Education for 2011-2020 and the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated July 27, 2007 No. 319-III "On Education" to the National Register. The accreditation procedure is carried out at the expense of the funds of the higher educational institution. At the moment, in the Law on Education, a separate article 9-1 is devoted to accreditation as one of the most important tools for improving the quality of educational services. Accreditation can be carried out by national and international accreditation bodies based on the standards developed by them. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan forms a register of accreditation agencies recognized in Kazakhstan.

According to the Education Law, accreditation is carried out on a voluntary basis. The educational organization independently chooses the accreditation body included in the register and pays for accreditation procedures at its own expense. Educational organizations that have passed specialized accreditation have the right to issue citizenship documents of their own sample for accredited programs.

Institutions that have passed institutional and specialized accreditation are exempt from the state certification procedure for accredited programs for the period of accreditation. The following amendments are also introduced into the Education Law, 2014:

financing of personnel training on the basis of an educational grant will be carried out in educational organizations that have passed institutional accreditation. Financing of personnel training in certain specialties on the basis of an educational grant will be carried out in educational organizations that have passed specialized accreditation for these specialties (Law on Education, 2014).

Private Sector

The transfer of public services to private ownership and the establishment of a private sector are the core tenets of neoliberal philosophy. In 1993, Kazakhstan government passed the law on higher education. This law allowed the operation of private universities in Kazakhstan, which were forbidden before transition to a new economic system. Since inception, private universities in Kazakhstan enjoy more freedom in terms of government interference. Like public universities, private educational entities maintain the right to accept students with state merit-based aid. As so, private, and public universities practice persistent competition to attract more students with government scholarships and self-paying students too.

The privatization of historically state educational properties in Kazakhstan has demonstrated extra dedication to a neoliberal ideology. In the 2000s, the Kazakhstani government started the second phase of privatization. In the second phase of privatization reform

in Kazakhstan, up to 12 historically state-controlled institutions became a target of neoliberal modifications. To be specific, the Kazakhstani government-initiated privatization by disposing of the shares of state institutions of higher education across the country. In the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development report – 2007, it was indicated that a program of partial or full privatization of some public universities had taken place. “In total, 16 universities have undergone this voluntary process, whereby a joint-stock company is established and at least 35% of shares are sold to private companies or individuals. Out of the 12 universities that have been privatized so far, two are now completely private, and others have 20 to 35% of government ownership.” (OECD report, 2007, p. 67).

Nazarbayev regarded the private sector as “more effective”. The head of the country clearly supported privatization reforms in Kazakhstan. As a result, there are more private universities in Kazakhstan than the public ones today. In the most recent OECD report, privatization, and the full and partial transfer of ownership of universities is considered effective for both sides, for the government and for the universities.

From the government’s perspective, the partial or full transfer of ownership implies potential savings in terms of future capital expenditures for which the government is no longer responsible, in addition to the resources generated by the sale of shares and potential profits if the privatized university successfully operates on a profit basis. From the university’s viewpoint, privatization means increased independence from government administrative regulations and the possibility of adopting more flexible management practices. (OECD report, 2017, p. 187).

Optimization

Kazakhstan’s private sector was established in the 1990s. The private sector has experienced numerous issues as private universities had to function in a highly competitive environment. Some private universities were able to survive and succeed, others not. In 2007, the

Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan initiated an optimization program, which targeted private universities. Specifically, in accordance with the optimization program, the Ministry of Education and Science revoked a license of those private universities that provide poor quality education. In particular, “the number of universities decreased from 146 to 125 units. Optimization mostly influenced private universities” (Nazarbayev speech, 2019).

Private universities are subject to closure due to several factors. First and foremost, universities must go through a voluntary accreditation to proceed with educational activities. The results of the accreditation determine whether a university continues operating or not. Specifically, “from 2006 on, the government has been taking active steps to improve quality by reducing the number of higher education institutions (the so-called “optimization policy”) and by putting in place a voluntary system of accreditation. (OECD report, p. 161).

Corporate Governance

Strauss and Corbin (1998) point out that “data collection should be followed immediately by analysis” in grounded theory. My initial data collection followed with an immediate inductive analysis in the NVivo coding program. NVivo helped me not lose track of my data and codes as I analyzed an overwhelmingly enormous number of texts in Kazakh, Russian, and English languages. The current theme about corporate governance of higher education institutions in Kazakhstan appeared in most recent documents. To be specific, the ideas of corporate governance started to appear in the documents published after the 2000s.

In former President Nazarbayev’s (Kazakhstan’s President, 1991-2019) last strategic plan, Strategy Kazakhstan, 2050 (Nazarbayev, 2012), he launched a modern type of management model that had never been practiced in Kazakhstan before. New personnel policies and

divisions of labor based on Western capitalistic models were initiated, which follow the notion of policy borrowing.

Specifically, there was a necessity to “introduce modern management tools and principles of corporate governance in the public sector” (Nazarbayev, 2012, p. 53) to increase the effectiveness of managerial skills of personnel in the market modernization.

Corporate governance logic also extended to the higher education system. According to the State Program of Education Development 2011-2020 (2010), one of the major objectives of education management is “improvement of education management including the introduction of corporate governance principles and formation of the public-private partnership in education.” (p. 23). Corporate governance principles in higher education include accountability of university managers to shareholders. In Kazakhstan, corporate governance principles are intended to be implemented through public-private partnership. Public-private partnership in higher education involves the government and business that work together to provide services to students and other stakeholders.

Corporate governance principles have been prioritized in the latest state education development program 2011-2020. (see Table 7). According to the program, universities in Kazakhstan gradually ought to incorporate the principles of corporate governance.

Table 7

The coverage of corporate governance principles

Indicator	2010	2015	2020
Implementati on of corporate governance	44%	65%	90%

principles in civilian universities			
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Joint-Stock Companies

The collegiate body has become an integral part of corporate higher education institutions in Kazakhstan after a transition to the market system. During the early 2000s, the Kazakh government began the privatization of public universities throughout the country. This second phase of privatization of state universities led to the creation of joint-stock companies. In this scheme, the government shares the ownership of a university with other stakeholders. Joint-stock companies have the legal status of privately owned universities. Although still subject to government regulation, they enjoy greater autonomy in decision making and financial management and more flexibility in governance.

The initiation, operation, and liquidation of universities – joint-stock companies in Kazakhstan remain to be organized by the Law on Joint-Stock Companies in Kazakhstan, passed, and signed by Nazarbayev in 2003. According to the law, any private company or individual can buy shares of corporate universities. In the article 4-1 Public Company, it was indicated that shareholders are still subject to limitations as they only “not less than thirty per cent of the total amount of the company’s outstanding ordinary shares shall be held by the shareholders, each holding no less than five per cent of the company’s ordinary shares company out of the total amount of the company’s outstanding ordinary shares;” Joint stock companies have exceptionally strong links with businesses and industry. Business leaders sit on the university’s advisory board. The advisory board influences course content and design and tends to tailor both to industry needs.

Private-Public Partnership

Public-private partnership is a type of communication between the general population and private areas, giving exchange of obligation to the private area for the arrangement of administrations that customarily have a place with the public area. In such a manner, one needs to manage explicit tasks, where the public authority moves certain rights (and simultaneously, obligations and dangers) to the private area.

Due to the reduction of public spending on higher education, universities in Kazakhstan seek to find alternative methods of funding opportunities. Universities in Kazakhstan, private and public, have no endowments. Therefore, they heavily rely on students with merit-based state scholarships, and students who pay tuition out of pocket.

In order to promote PPP, the system of social contract and mechanism of state financing of the activity of non-commercial non-governmental organizations, in a form of grants and other mechanisms will be improved. Financing of nongovernmental sector as a basis of long-term mechanisms of PPP will be provided. Participation of society at different levels of education management will be implemented in the form of boards of trustees. (State Education Development program 2011-2020)

Table 8

Public-private partnership

Objective: Public-private partnership
Target: 11 national universities
Goal: Creation of Joint Stock Companies

Rational: Diversification of the governance system Decentralization Academic and institutional autonomy Financial independence
Reform: State Program of Education Development 2011-2020
Results: 1. President's Decree on the Revision of the Appointment of rectors at 11 national universities.

Kazakh-British University

To develop and examine this theme about corporate governance, I accessed additional data resources. I reviewed the strategic plans and websites of universities/joint-stock companies. Unfortunately, additional sources of information did not provide any details of the processes of the transition from state-owned universities to joint-stock companies. Nor was I able to acquire clear information about the responsibilities of the board of governors at the national universities in Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, one of the well-known and most lucrative deals in the relations to transferring state universities into private ownership could attend the sales of Kazakh-British Technical University (KBTU). KBTU was established in Almaty, the former capital of Kazakhstan, in 2001. For decades, KBTU was one of the leading and innovative universities, which provided majors in the oil and gas industry. The graduates of KBTU hold key positions in this sector as well. Even though KBTU maintained a reputation for attracting the most

competitive and talented students inside and outside the country, in 2018, the university was auctioned for approximately 11,37 billion tenge (27,934,157.10 USD). When I tried to find out who purchased the shares of KBTU in 2018, I could not acquire any reliable information. Neither on MES's website, nor on KBTU's. To be specific, most of the deals that involved the purchases of the shares of state universities in Kazakhstan are incredibly anonymous.

Less Financial Dependence. Neoliberalism is a powerful and complex economic, political, and cultural system that infuses market values in many aspects of policy, daily life, and encompassing national and global societies. Neoliberalism is associated with individual freedom and rationality of choice. With an intensified drive for personal freedom, education has transformed from representing a public good to a private good. After the transition to a market-based system, Kazakhstani universities introduced tuition charges. Due to the shortage of monetary support, which is so pivotal for public higher education, a financial burden of college tuition has been created for students and their families. In the previous Soviet system, the communist government funded higher education. In the centrally planned economy of the USSR, students in Kazakhstan were assigned which university to attend and what curriculum to follow (Azimbayeva, 2017; Maksutova, 2004). But they paid no tuition. On the contrary, with the neoliberal policies in independent Kazakhstan, government interference was minimized by providing students more choices in the types of universities (public, private), funding opportunities (grants, scholarships, loans), and degrees. In 2005's annual presidential address to the nation, Nazarbayev acknowledged the government's responsibility to support the talented and the bright "We have many talented boys and girls who are willing and able to become engineers or technologists. Through education grants and credits, the government will help them

in a very real way. I urge the private sector to join actively in this initiative” (Address of the President Nazarbayev to the People of Kazakhstan, 2005, para.168).

Since the introduction of neoliberal reforms, government spending on higher education has shrunk dramatically. Decrease in public support for education is a fundamental characteristic of the neoliberal paradigm. Since the introduction of the economic system based on market ideas, higher education institutions throughout Kazakhstan experienced extreme shortages in government spending. Spending on higher education is exceedingly underfunded. Neoliberal policies have had a negative effect on the way universities obtain funding from the Ministry of Education and Science. Before transition, universities in Soviet Kazakhstan maintained a high level of financial support from the government. However, due to severe economic recession after the collapse of the USSR, Kazakhstani higher education has been experiencing severe reductions in public spending.

Kazakhstan achieved a high level of social development under the former Soviet Union and at independence in 1991 inherited universal access to basic education, almost universal literacy, and high female participation in all levels of education. Such achievements, made possible with high commitment and sustained high investment in education for several decades, compared favorably with middle- or higher-income countries globally. However, the severe economic downturn following independence squeezed public financing for education, which dropped from over 6 percent of gross domestic product in 1991 to about 3 percent in 1994 before rising to around 4 percent in 1999 (Asian Development Bank, 2001).

Tuition-driven Universities. Reduction in state funding led to inevitable measures, such as the introduction of tuition charges and student loans at the institutions of higher education in Kazakhstan. Due to the decrease in financial dependence from the government, university charges have become the responsibility of students and their families. This argument remains extremely neoliberal in nature as many countries that adopted neoliberalism experience similar complications. In particular, the ideas that education is no longer must be considered a public

good but rather a private good. Therefore, families in Kazakhstan, like in other neoliberal-based states, have to perceive tertiary education as a personal investment for the future of their offspring.

Universities in Kazakhstan, private and public, remain tuition driven. Most of the students enrolled in higher education institutions pay university tuitions out of their pocket. Although, there is a channel of obtaining government education grants to fund tertiary education, only students who receive high test scores, could be eligible to get them. There is a very little fraction of intellectually capable students in Kazakhstan who are actually the recipients of state educational merit-based grants.

In 2014, 70% of Kazakhstan's total expenditure on higher education came from private rather than public sources. By way of comparison, across all OECD countries in 2014, 30% of funding came from private sources. Public funds for higher education places are allocated to the student, rather than the institution; however, the majority of students (71% in 2017) fund their participation in higher education using their own or family funds, which can lead to inequity of access opportunities to higher education. (OECD report, 2017, p. 87)

Student Loans and Educational Savings Accounts

Nazarbayev speculated, "At the same time the government should create a modern system of student loans to be offered through second-tier banks and backed by state guarantees" (Address of the President Nazarbayev to the People of Kazakhstan, 2005, para. 202). However, a loan industry was created to support the tuition costs for individual students. This tradeoff is common in neoliberal paradigms: freedom but at a cost. Kazakhstan's higher education system follows this familiar pattern of privatization where something is given (in this case, freedom of choice) but at a cost (in this case, tuition and fees which create individual student loan debt). Power elites get something (increased wealth) from giving something (individual choice). Of

course, the key is not to break the system that is providing the wealth accumulation: loan terms must be high to increase profits but not so high that individuals cannot say yes to them. In 2005, Nazarbayev directed the creation of a modern student loan system offered by second-tier banks (all banks in Kazakhstan, except the National Bank) and backed by state guarantees (Address of the President Nazarbayev to the People of Kazakhstan, 2005). The market logic is obvious.

As a measure to assist families with college tuition out of pocket, the Kazakhstani government introduced student educational loans and savings accounts. This idea belongs to the former president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as many other initiatives implemented under Nazarbayev's supervision. In one of his speeches to the people of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev ordered the government to "develop a savings system similar to that which is now realized by "Zhylstroisberbank" in mortgage construction. The people of Kazakhstan should have new opportunities to save funds for educating their children by means of obtaining interest bonuses from the state" (Nazarbayev speech, 2011).

Student 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. (Nazarbayev University School of Graduation, 2014).

Advance accessibility is subject to a danger evaluation that incorporates measures of scholarly execution. Second-level banks give instructive credits, and the advance chief is ensured by the JSC Financial Center of the Republic of Kazakhstan (JSC Information-Analytic Center, 2015). By and by, this assurance cycle implies that numerous understudies can't seriously apply for "true" understudy loans, as they would be a too extraordinary danger. The public understudy

loan framework is as yet corrupted by an approach activity during the 1990s, which straightforwardly gave advances to understudies. This program had amazingly high default rates; the awful obligations are yet being effectively gathered.

The individuals who are endorsed for a state-ensured credit need co-underwriters. It was accounted for by the OECD audit group that a critical level of "ensured" borrowers don't, eventually, get advances. Occasionally, the bank severs contact with the borrower, and now and then, a co-underwriter can't be found. It was likewise answered to the audit group that the ordinary credit plan of action of understudies who need to get is to private advance business sectors, where financing costs might be as much as 25%. The State Educational Accumulation Scheme (SEAS) presented in 2013 may hold a guarantee. However, it experiences configuration abandons. Under the SEAS, the public authority pays an extra interest premium on instructive investment accounts, subsequently reassuring guardians to gather reserve funds to pay future educational expenses for their youngsters. Where the sum gathered is lacking to pay the educational expense, an instructive advance can be accommodated the equilibrium. In 2015 there was a base initial commitment of KZT 5 946 and a most extreme term of twenty years. The state premium is presently 5% per annum. There is a little extra premium of 2% for vagrants, individuals with inabilities, youngsters from enormous families, and understudies from families with paying underneath the resource least.

The Finance Center of the Ministry of Education and Science detailed to the OECD survey group that, since the commencement of the SEAS in 2012, just 11 000 individuals have made stores under the plan – a figure which is far underneath the 500 000 investors anticipated at the program's beginning. Kazakhstan's vulnerabilities about the economy (given the rising expansion and the danger of additional money depreciation) decrease the allure of a reserve

funds vehicle named in tenge. There is additionally a social predisposition implied in this plan: it will be more alluring to those families who have the monetary ability to save and an inclination towards doing as such – and it will accordingly utilize public assets to support conduct that may well have happened in any case. Be that as it may, it will be less alluring for lower SES families – both in light of the fact that they frequently need assets to save and in light of the fact that they are more averse to seek advanced education for their kids. However, it is accurately these families that remain to profit the most from a viable focus on assignment of gradual public financing.

Loan availability is dependent on a risk assessment that includes measures of academic performance. Educational loans are provided by second-tier banks and the loan principal is guaranteed by the JSC Financial Center of the Republic of Kazakhstan (JSC Information-Analytic Center, 2015). In practice, this guarantee process means that many students cannot meaningfully apply for “official” student loans, as they would be seen as too great risk. The public student loan system is still tainted by a policy initiative in the 1990s which had the state directly provide loans to students. This programme had extremely high default rates; the bad debts are still being actively collected.

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%.

The State Educational Accumulation Scheme (SEAS) introduced in 2013 may hold promise but suffers from design defects. Under the SEAS, the government pays an additional interest premium on educational savings accounts thereby encouraging parents to accumulate savings to pay future tuition fees for their children. Where the amount accumulated is insufficient to pay the tuition fee, an educational loan can be provided for the balance. In 2015 there was a minimum introductory contribution of KZT 5 946 and a maximum term of twenty years. The state premium is currently 5% per annum. There is a small additional premium of 2% for orphans, people with disabilities, children from large families and students from families with income below the subsistence minimum.

The Finance Center of the Ministry of Education and Science reported to the OECD review team that, since the inception of the 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 behavior 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. (OECD report, 2017, p. 137).

Global Integration: The Rise of English

English language education has remained an essential part of Kazakhstani universities and schools. Kazakhstan has adopted a new trend concerning English language education after the 2000s. One of the reasons for endorsing English-based education remains economic development and international collaboration. Kazakhstani government has demonstrated a strong desire to support English education as the bulk of state funding does to English-based schools and universities.

Lingua Franca

Cooperation in worldwide markets progressively occurs in and through English. As worldwide English grows, developing countries feel the pressure to become globally competitive. Inspired to become an equal competitor with capitalist West, countries like Kazakhstan want to increase the number of Kazakh citizens with English proficiency. Universities, schools, and day care centers are the vital venues for the expansion of English among young citizens.

I believe that the dissemination of English language across schools and universities in Kazakhstan was part of the neoliberal plans as the number of other countries that have been the subject of radical economic restructuring, particularly in the former Soviet camp. Fluency in

foreign languages or knowing Kazakhstan's new allies' languages after the transition from a planned economy to a market relationship have been prioritized on the state level. Studying foreign languages became a modern trend beginning from a major public representative to a regular schoolteacher.

Naturalization of English Schools and Universities

Nazarbayev set a task for the nation to be knowledgeable of the Kazakh language but also engage in the international communities. In this regard, national education policies have turned devoted attention to developing a strong and effective basis for students to get familiar with foreign languages, specifically English. English education has been prioritized in the number of official documents. In this regard, I have become interested in the ways in which the global spread of neoliberal free-market doctrines naturalizes the use of English as the language of global competitiveness. In the document titled 100 steps towards innovative development, in step 79 it was articulated that "Stage-by stage transition to the use of the English language in the education system is the current priority of our schools and universities to increase Kazakhstan's competitiveness."

President Nazarbayev expressed plenty of concerns over the competitiveness of Kazakhstan's higher education system in Central Asia and the world. Nazarbayev is a strong supporter of plurilingualism in Kazakhstan, specifically in Kazakh schools. In one of the president's speeches, Nazarbayev noted that "high school graduates should speak Kazakh, Russian and English. The result of teaching should be mastery of critical thinking skills, independent research and in-depth analysis of information" (Nazarbayev's speech, 2016). Nevertheless, English is not the only priority for the president. Since Kazakhstan underwent the Russification policies during the Soviet times since independence, Nazarbayev has been

emphasizing a vital need for the constant activation of quality training in the national language. After 1991, schools with the Kazakh language of instruction were established all over the country. There was a shortage of quality textbooks and instructors in the Kazakh language during the first years of independence as students in the pedagogical universities trained solemnly in Russian.

Pedagogical English Training Courses. English-language education is undeniably an important manifestation of neoliberal policies in Kazakhstani higher education. To create human capital for the global market and privatized worldwide corporations in the recently transitioned knowledge-based society, the government, with the leadership of President Nazarbayev, promoted and accelerated English-language education across the country. To meet the novel president's requirements, the Ministry of Education and Science adopted a program of education development, where English-language education has been foregrounded. Nazarbayev argued in one of his messages to the people of Kazakhstan,

the transition to teaching certain natural science disciplines in English in the tenth and eleventh grades will start in 2019. As a result, all our graduates will master three languages at the level necessary for life and work in the country and in the global world". High school students across the country began studying Math, Physics, Chemistry, and other STEM disciplines in English. High school instructors, in their turns, were all required to participate in English learning training delivered by the MES. (Nazarbayev speech, 2017).

Currently, there are country-wide training programs remaining available for high school teachers to improve their English expertise and to eventually teach STEM subjects in English. The government ensured various measures to increase the number of pedagogical staff with English expertise. In particular, Bolashak quotas for pedagogical staff have become available on

a competitive basis. In addition, the standard curriculum at schools and universities have undergone changes to meet new English requirements.

training of English-speaking pedagogical staff for secondary, technical and vocational, and higher education under the “Bolashak” International Scholarship of the President of Republic of Kazakhstan will be ensured.

training of pedagogical staff with polylingual education in the country’s higher educational institutions will be carried out through the increase in loans for foreign language teaching in the range of basic subjects. For this purpose, the standard curriculum will be updated in the part concerning training of pedagogical staff in trilingual teaching; (State education development program of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2011-2020).

Even though various measures have been done to develop English education, there is no data and documentation available to conclude the effectiveness of teaching natural science disciplines in English, nor the quality of English language training for schoolteachers.

English Speaking Faculty

There is an increase in the number of English-speaking faculty members at the institutions of higher education in Kazakhstan. More and more faculty and administrative members from abroad have been attracted to work at Kazakhstan's universities. The biggest share of international faculty and administrators belongs to Nazarbayev University, Kazakh-British University, Suleyman Demirel University, and KIMEP.

According to Nazarbayev University strategic plan 2018-2030, “NU’s faculty are drawn from 55 countries, is truly international” (p.11). English is a language of instruction, and almost 78% of faculty members are expatriate employers from the US, UK, Japan, China, South Korea, Germany, and Greece.

the largest numbers of foreign faculty members are clearly at Nazarbayev University, which has been given a mandate to recruit international faculty and administrative staff who are paid at internationally competitive levels; a few other exceptions, such as KIMEP in Almaty, are also able attract a fair number of international faculty. (OECD report, 2017, p. 177).

International Partnership

Leading universities in Kazakhstan, specifically Nazarbayev University and Kazakh-British Technical University have been engaged in international partnership with internationally well-respected and highly prestigious institutions of higher education of the US, UK, Singapore, Malaysia, China, etc.

Semester off in English Speaking Countries for Faculty Members. Faculty members and schoolteachers can receive government-funded international internships. Under the presidential Bolashak scholarship, this category of employees has an opportunity to apply and receive 100% funding for master's and doctorate degrees.

Since the introduction of the Strategy for Academic Mobility in the Republic of Kazakhstan, outbound faculty movement has been increasing. In the period between 2011 and 2015, more than 2 600 faculty travelled abroad for internships, study, and professional development (including 1 472 faculty who were in receipt of Bolashak scholarships). This represents over 5% of the total number of faculty members in Kazakhstan (OECD, 2017, p. 161)

Universities with the English Mode of Instruction. As I was coding various policy documents and speeches of the president, I have found a stronger emphasis on learning English than Kazakh and Russian. One of the major pieces of evidence to my point would be the establishment of the world-class university in Kazakhstan with full English instruction – Nazarbayev University. Like other reforms in higher education, the prioritization of the; on the is language in higher education was initiated by the former president of the republic. “The President’s decision to make English – the language of international research – Nazarbayev University’s language of instruction has been critical to its success.”

Nationalism

Neoliberalism and nationalism have often been portrayed as antithetical to one another. As the analysis of policy documents and the speeches of the former president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, nationalists in Kazakhstan have employed neoliberal policies in higher education for nationalists' reasons in a peculiar way. In the current section of my dissertation, I intend to provide the findings concerning two binaries, such as nationalism and neoliberalism. Specifically, I found that after gaining independence, Kazakhstani pro-nationalist policy makers, under the guidance of the former president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, promoted policies aimed at increased nationalism in parallel with globalism.

Nationalism, along with globalism, two different binaries, which are seemingly opposite to each other, have been advanced in numerous forms in Kazakhstan. The establishment of a national university with English instruction and internationally diverse faculty and staff on the one hand. The simultaneous development of Kazakh and English languages in schools and universities on the other hand. Assumingly, policy makers in Kazakhstan have been implementing policies and reforms to combine two distinct ideologies, nationalism, and globalism. The results of the analysis of the current data will be provided in this section to discuss how Kazakhstan promoted seemingly opposite political ideologies in the higher education system.

Nationalism is an ideology and a direction of politics aimed at protecting the fundamental principles and interests of a particular nation. Nationalists believe that each country should govern itself, without outside interference. In this essence, Davidson (2010) stated that the supporters of a free-market system had always been ambivalent towards nationalism and national identity. Although most neoliberals tend to describe themselves as supporters of globalization, nationalism is the “necessary ideological corollary of capitalism” (Davidson, 2010,

para. 4). Nation state is important for capitalists as they want territorial protection to compete with other countries. In the days of troubles, capitalists still vitally rely on nation states to ease the consequences if they lose. Conversely, a global state cannot provide similar protection. As Davidson (2010) indicated the nation state was not obligated to ensure the protection unless the capitalist would convince the national interests of a particular free market activity. “It is the collective competitiveness of capitalism, expressed at the level of the state which requires nationalism as a framework within which competitiveness can be justified in terms of a higher aspiration than increased profit margin”.

Regeneration of Pure Kazakh Language

In the 1930s, targeted at “social and cultural unification of all ethnic groups on the basis of Soviet Russian culture”, the *Russifikatsia* policy spread across the Soviet republics (Khazanov, 1993, p. 183). Under this policy, the slogan “merging the nations” became widespread, with Russian as a superior language across the USSR. In the Soviet Union, monolingualism was the desired outcome for the development of Soviet civic identity. All significant higher education institutions in Soviet Kazakhstan practiced Russian language instruction (Mitrofasnkaya, 2012). It should be added that during this period, there was a policy of reducing to a minimum Kazakh-speaking school, full Russification of the learning process in Kazakhstan. This resulted in the fact that part of the population of Kazakhstan, especially the northern regions, were cut off from national roots and language. People, generations of the 60s and 80s, are quite common who do not know the Kazakh language or do not know it perfectly. The problem also affected their children. This problem is very acute in Kazakhstan, and therefore in the subsequent period when Kazakhstan gained political independence, the government paid close attention to the language policy. In particular, the former president of the state

acknowledged that the Kazakhstani people were at risk of losing their national values due to the discriminatory reforms performed by the Soviet Union (Nazarbayev, 1994). Nazarbayev's statement in one of his writings clearly indicated his position over the problems with national language and culture as he suggested, "In 1960, Kazakhs became an ethnic minority on their own soil. They were representing as little as one-third of the republic's population. Having lost their traditional way of life, at the beginning of the 20th century, by the end of the century, Kazakh people almost lost their main heritage – their language and culture" (Nazarbayev, 2010, p.23).

As a part of the nationalistic uprising after the collapse of the USSR, the idea of the regeneration of pure Kazakh language has spread around schools and universities in Kazakhstan. In the state program of education development of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2011-2020, it was indicated that "A new system of continuous learning of the Kazakh language "kindergarten – school, vocational lyceum, college – higher educational institution" will be created which will allow every Kazakhstani citizen acquire the state language in full." After almost 70 years of discrimination based upon language, more people (98%) in Kazakhstan speak Russian, than Kazakh (72%) language (Kazakh bureau of statistics, 2019). To tackle this problem, Nazarbayev suggested,

a responsible and respectful language policy is one of the factors that will help to consolidate Kazakh ethnicity. The Kazakh language is our spiritual center. Our aim is to actively develop the Kazakh language by using it in all areas of life. We should develop a modern Kazakh language as a legacy for our descendants, integrating the experience of past generations with our own living history. The state does a lot to strengthen the positions of our state Language. It is necessary to continue implementation of the measures we have put in place to popularize the Kazakh language. From 2025 we need to modernize our language to use Latin fonts and a Latin alphabet. We make this decision for the sake of the future of our children – it is necessary for Kazakhstan to enjoy full global integration. This will enable our children to have a better understanding of the English language, the internet and reinforce our desire to modernize the Kazakh language.

We should modernize the Kazakh language. It is necessary to make the language modern, to allow agreement on issues of terminology, permanently resolving the issues that come from translating foreign words into Kazakh language. These issues should not be resolved by disparate individuals – the Government should resolve this. There are terms commonly adopted across the world that enrich any language. But these tend to make life unnecessarily complicated, bringing confusion and overwhelming our memories. There are plenty of examples of this. I suggest a contest where our youth suggest a hundred modern books that are translated into Kazakh in a modern way (Strategy Development 2050, p. 56).

The policy texts clearly indicated a connection between the advancement of knowledge of Kazakh language to good citizenship and patriotism. So, one of the major purposes of education policy makers was to nurture young patriots of a newly established state through language that was neglected for a long period of time. In Kazakhstan's strategic development 2050, Nazarbayev once again underscored the history of the Kazakh language, which was on the brink of eradication, "We have worked to restore our historic Kazakh culture and language after many years of decline." Although Nazarbayev was quite critical about the language policies before Kazakhstan gained independence since the Kazakh language was not welcomed in most state schools and institutions of higher education, in one of his speeches, he discussed the benefits of knowing the Russian language for the nation,

nowadays we take active measures to create the conditions for our children to learn Russian and English equally with the Kazakh language. This three-language policy should be encouraged on a state level. We should treat Russian language and Cyrillic writing in the same careful way we do Kazakh. We appreciate that knowing the Russian language provided a historical advantage to our nation. No one can ignore the fact that for centuries, because of the Russian language, Kazakh citizens have gained additional knowledge, expanded their world view, and been able to better communicate both domestically and abroad. We should work towards a similar breakthrough in learning the English language. Being able to communicate in the language of the modern world will reveal new and unlimited opportunities for each citizen of our country (Strategy Development 2050, p. 23).

Kazakh Schools

To regenerate Kazakh language, the policy makers in Kazakhstan started launching schools based upon Kazakh instruction. At first, there was a significant lack of school and university instructors proficient enough to teach in Kazakh. Over time, this issue has been solved by establishing Kazakh schools, kindergartens, and institutions of higher education with Kazakh mode of instruction.

The regeneration of Kazakh education was symbolic. Through education young Kazakhs in their mother tongue could possibly solidify Kazakhstan's sovereignty and political independence from the USSR.

language should function as a unifying influence for the people of Kazakhstan. Therefore, our language policy should be implemented in a competent and consistent way and should not limit the ability of Kazakhstan's citizens to speak a language of their choosing. You know our policy: by 2025 95% of Kazakhstan citizens should know the Kazakh language. We are creating the environment to allow that to happen. Today more than 60% of schoolchildren are educated in the state language. Kazakh-language education is being introduced in all schools. This means that in ten to twelve years we will have a new generation of Kazakhstan citizens all being able to speak the Kazakh language. Thus, by 2025 the Kazakh language will be present in all spheres of life – Kazakh will become a widely-known language. This, of course, will become the most important achievement of our state. Our sovereignty and our independence will finally generate something that binds and cements the nation – a mother tongue. This will be the crown jewel of our state's sovereignty. (Nazarbayev, 1997, para. 17).

Kazakh Textbooks. Over the years, problems with Kazakh training and instruction have not been solved completely. As evidenced in recent documents, there is a need to adopt modern technologies for learning Kazakh. Nazarbayev speculated that to promote the importance of learning Kazakh language among the younger generation, who are eager to study English than Kazakh, there should be a shift towards modernization and innovation in teaching Kazakh language. Nazarbayev insisted that Kazakh language training should involve audio and video materials as it could potentially increase the effectiveness of the teaching process. The

competitive nature of behavior is also promoted around textbook publishing houses. Like in each area, social, economic, and political, Nazarbayev emphasized the quality of textbooks via competition. In the message to Kazakh nation in 2016, Nazarbayev argued,

third, the Government should speed up the implementation of the “Unity of three Languages’ ‘cultural project. I would like to draw your attention to the urgent need to increase the quality of Kazakh language teaching, as this language unites the entire society. Having carefully studied relevant international experience, we should develop and introduce the most advanced programs and techniques for teaching Kazakh. It is vital to develop innovative methodological and practical manuals and audio and video materials to promote the effective learning of our national language. There are only one or two publishing houses that constantly win bids to publish textbooks in Kazakh. Do we have the kind of competition that contributes to the improvement of the textbooks’ quality? The quality of textbooks in Kazakh does not meet the standard. The books do not entice people to learn Kazakh, on the contrary, they push them away from the language. Relevant government agencies should take all appropriate measures to resolve this issue (Nazarbayev, 2016).

Regeneration of Kazakh Traditions

Not only language, but Kazakh traditions and customs remained forbidden while Kazakhstan was a part of the USSR. “We are from a society where somebody wanted to construct a terrible mutation without the nationality of different nations that has never existed in history.” (Nazarbayev speech, 2000).

Nazarbayev is a Champion of Ethnic Kazakh Population

The growth of nationalism in post-soviet Kazakhstan has coincided with the appointment of the first president, Nursultan Nazarbayev. Since the beginning of the establishment of Kazakhstan as an independent country and having discarded the communist ideology, Nazarbayev attempted to position himself as a champion of Kazakh ethnic people. Although being a minority in the post-soviet Kazakhstan, ethnic Kazakhs have embraced the new policies targeted at the development of national interests after a long history of Russian-Soviet oppression. In one of the president’s books, Nazarbayev indicated that “because pre-perestroika

Moscow-centered power politics placed the Kazakh nation on the cusp of disaster and degeneracy through a purposeful process of denationalization was pursued for decades, it is entirely appropriate that the interests of the indigenous nation, the Kazakhs, are specially stipulated in some cases such as (1) matters pertaining to the revival of the national culture and language, (2) the rise of spiritual-cultural and other ties to the Kazakh diaspora, and (3) the creation of a proper environment for the repatriation of persons forced to leave Kazakhstan”. The sudden rise of nationalism was inevitable as Kazakhstan had been long suffering from Russophobia and Russian dominance in every part of the state. In the Strategy – 2030, Nazarbayev pointed out that “the regeneration of the Kazakh traditions and the language is perceived as quite natural”.

As evidenced in the number of documents, the strategic direction of higher education in Kazakhstan is clearly influenced by the President’s office (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development report, 2017). Specifically, in the number of official speeches to Kazakhstan people, Nazarbayev devoted a great attention to the reforms in the system of higher education. In his speeches, Nazarbayev discussed the importance of improving human capital by investing in education and transferring from a resource-based to a knowledge-based economy through the implementation of rigorous reforms and policies in higher education. In the strategy of the development of Kazakhstan until 2050, the former president of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev stated, “Kazakhstan’s oil and gas complex remains the powerhouse of our economy, which facilitates the growth of other sectors.” We have successfully created a modern and efficient oil, gas, and mining sector. Our success in this area will help us to build a new economy of the future.” The country’s leadership projected to extensively use worldwide gas revenues to facilitate the transition to more advanced economies towards greater dependence on knowledge

and expertise. As I was analyzing the former president's speeches, I became deeply convinced that he had a clear image of what direction the people of Kazakhstan should move to increase their own quality of life and the destiny of the entire country. Specifically, Nazarbayev has a clear vision of the people in the country and who we should look up to, "our society's role model should be a citizen of Kazakhstan who knows his or her history, language, culture but who is also modern, fluent in foreign languages and has progressive and global worldview" (Nazarbayev's speech, 2018).

Nazarbayev University – National Globalization

In Kazakhstan, neoliberalism is promoted nationalistically as a way for Kazakhstan to prosper as a country by transition from a resource-based economy to a knowledge-based economy. Kazakhstan has formulated the goal of improving the quality of its education system, with international standards and practices serving as key points of reference. One of the major goals at the higher education level is to foster national identity. In this sense, the establishment of a national university with international collaboration was a vital step to promote nationalism among the young generation. Nazarbayev in his speech in the opening of Nazarbayev University states, "I believe that the university should be created as a national brand, harmoniously combining Kazakhstan's identity with the best international educational and scientific practice."

Nazarbayev University is a national university established in 2006 by Nazarbayev's initiative. President Nazarbayev and his government began to consider how the country could strengthen its national university program: one answer – to create a world-class English language university in Astana, the nation's new capital. "Creation of the new university is the most important national project... [This project] will have a significant impact on many Kazakhstanis and the development of a backbone for our state. I believe that the new university... should be

created as a national brand, harmoniously combining Kazakhstani identity with the best international educational and scientific practice” (Nazarbayev University Strategy 2018-2030, p. 2).

Equal Partnership with Western Partners – We Learn from Them, They Learn from Us.

The world-class university was a pioneer idea to eradicate the country’s dependence on natural resources such as oil and gas and to diversify by investing in human capital to develop a knowledge-based economy. In fact, Kazakhstan ranks 12th place in the world with regards to oil reserves. Economically, Kazakhstan has made significant progress demonstrating gradual growth after getting independence from the Soviet Union In 1991. The diversification of national economy is a necessity for Kazakhstan because the price on oil and gas is unstable and leads to a lower GDP growth. Sabzalieva (2016) emphasized the role of a knowledge-based economy in developing countries as Kazakhstan and stated, “the brain power rather than industrial power will bring prosperity to a country and enable it to remain or become competitive on a world stage” (p.424). Moreover, the most distinguished researcher in the international higher education Altbach (2005) emphasized that the knowledge economy was central to 21st-century development. The Nazarbayev University is a culmination of numerous educational and public policies and procedures previously implemented to introduce a knowledge-based society for sustainable and gradual economic development in the post-Soviet state neoliberal economy.

The World-class University Nazarbayev University (NU) opened its doors in 2010. This university holds the name of the first and current leader of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev. In the opening ceremony, President Nazarbayev underscored the significance of this ambitious enterprise and set a task of becoming “a national standard of higher education for the rest of the

country”. The unprecedented project started from recruiting well-qualified scholars and education leaders inside and outside the country. One of the first entities to become interested in creating the university from scratch was the World Bank, an international financial institution that provides loans to countries of the world for capital projects. In general, Kazakhstan became a member of the World Bank in 1992 after a devastating economic crisis in Asia and Russia. Kazakhstan has received multiple loans for rehabilitation, structural adjustment, and regulation of the financial sector since then. Although the World Bank is not one of the NU’s strategic partners, the World Bank has played a major role in developing this project since the beginning.

NU’s partners have included Cambridge University, Carnegie Mellon University, Colorado School of Mines, Duke University, National University of Singapore, University College London, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Wisconsin-Madison; its research partners include Lawrence Berkeley National Labs, Argonne National Labs, the University of Pittsburgh, Duke Medicine, the National Cancer Institute of Japan, and others. NU’s partners are helping to create an institution that meets the highest global standards for university education and research and is at the same time uniquely Kazakhstani. In its relationships with partners, NU is firmly in the lead. (Nazarbayev University Strategic Plan 2011-2020, p. 9).

The World Bank offered Kazakhstan a plan for modernization and commercialization of national research institutions throughout the state. Part of this project was the construction of a research network within universities like the US model of research centers. However, as a financial enterprise, the World Bank has never had any business projects in the field of higher education in any countries. Consequently, the World Bank turned to the world’s top research universities to support and to assist in developing this initiative. The World Bank organized multiple international business trips for a Kazakh team, which comprised educational leaders from the Ministry of Science and Education of Kazakhstan to visit schools, such as Harvard, Stanford, Massachusetts Institute Technology, and the University of Cambridge. The strategic

partnership at NU with the world's top research universities is developed based on "we learn from them, and they learn from us". The vice-president of academic policy at Nazarbayev University, Kadisha Dairova, described the partnership as mutually beneficial for all parties involved in it. According to NU's strategic plan, one of the major goals is to develop a program of world-class research by partnering with the world's best researchers and research institutions. Currently, NU has six strategic partners, University of Pennsylvania (USA), Duke University (USA), University of Pittsburgh (USA), University of Wisconsin-Madison (USA), Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (Singapore), and University of Cambridge (UK).

Openness to Western Innovative Ideas but Maintain Ethical Identity. Nationalistic nature of education was also emphasized in the legislation. In the Article 3 of the Law on Education in 2007 about the principles of public policy in the field of education "4) secular, humanistic and evolving education, a priority of civil and national values, human life and health, free personal development". Education has also undergone major transformations under the reforms targeted at the development of nationalism in Kazakhstan. The first attempt made by the president was the declaration of a Kazakh language as a state official language and the inception of Kazakh language schools throughout the entire state. Subsequently, the president attempted to create a national idea based on the characteristics of a successful Kazakhstani individual. In 2018, Nazarbayev delivered a presidential speech to Kazakh nation. In this address, Nazarbayev underscored the importance of keeping our national identity and being open to the Western values. In fact, Nazarbayev stated "our society's role model should be a citizen of Kazakhstan who knows his or her history, language, culture but who is also modern, fluent in foreign languages and has progressive and global worldview".

Meritocracy

Meritocracy is one of the core ideas of neoliberalism. Merit-based assistance is financial aid provided to students who demonstrate academic, artistic, athletic, and other talents. Unlike financial aid based on students' needs, merit-based aid does not consider students and their families' financial needs. The opponents believe that the primary disadvantage of merit-based programs is that they focus on a group of students who most likely would have gone onto higher education without any additional aid. As a result, these programs do little or nothing to address long-standing gaps in college attendance, whether by race or by income level (Heller & Marin 2002, 2004; Heller 2002).

Kazakhstan is one of the former Soviet republics located in Central Asia. It became an independent state in December 1991. As part of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan practiced a centrally controlled political system and a planned economy based in the public sector. After independence, Kazakhstan transitioned to a market-based economy that was based on neoliberal policies, creating private industry, and converting public business enterprises to private owners (Bayetova & Robertson, 2019). The new economic system also impacted higher education in independent Kazakhstan. In the USSR's centrally planned economy, students in Kazakhstan were assigned which university to attend and what profession to obtain (Azimbayeva, 2017; Maksutova, 2012). On the contrary, with the neoliberal policies in independent Kazakhstan, government interference was minimized by providing students more choices in universities (public, private), funding opportunities (grants, scholarships, loans), and degrees.

The Support of Academic Giftedness

As my current research demonstrates, Kazakhstani policymakers strongly support the ideas of meritocracy and government financial aid based on students' academic achievements, "the system in Kazakhstan places particular focus on high-performing students and there is a lack

of data and monitoring processes to support disadvantaged students” (OECD report, 2017, p. 115). Current education policies focus on providing scholarships to students with excellent academic indicators without considering other factors, including their financial needs.

data from the Ministry of Education and Science (based on a survey of higher education institutions, to which 80 institutions replied) do indicate though that roughly two-thirds of “students from poor families” study without any financial support (omitted)

poor and uneven student preparation as well as current admissions requirements tends to favor students from better-resourced schools and those whose parents can afford tutoring. The systemic challenge of lower quality, less well-resourced schooling for rural students and students from low socioeconomic groups acts as a significant barrier to equal academic achievement. Measures to address this issue remain limited, and the current financial aid system negatively affects equity of access (OECD report, 2017, pp. 115, 118).

The OECD review team has provided two comprehensive reports about the higher education system in the country, one in 2007 and in 2017. The OECD assessment remains a significant evaluation for the current situation in higher education in Kazakhstan and it provides recommendations for improvement. It is up to the individual country to follow recommendations or not. Kazakhstan is not an OECD member country, but it aspires to maintain the OECD principles and standards. In particular, the country’s leadership engage in adopting the OECD standards to reform not only economy, both other industries to transition from a recourse-based to a knowledge-based economy,

today the member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) represent basic indicators of developed countries. This organization brings together 34 countries that produce more than 60 percent of global GDP. There are six more candidates to join the OECD: Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Russia, and South Africa. The OECD member countries have undergone the path of deep modernization. They now demonstrate high rates of investment, scientific research, productivity, a large share of small and medium-sized businesses, and high standards of living. These indicators of OECD countries provide a natural benchmark for Kazakhstan on our way to joining the top 30 developed nations of the world.” (OECD report 2017, p. 134)

i set the task to introduce in Kazakhstan a number of principles and standards of the OECD. They are reflected in the draft Plan. In our economy, we plan to reach annual GDP growth not less than four percent. We should increase the volume of investment from the current 18 percent of the country's GDP to 30 percent. The development of knowledge-based economy aims to see the share of non-oil products in Kazakhstan's export potential rise to 70 percent" (Nazarbayev's speech, 2014, para. 16).

Nazarbayev's Merit-based Scholarships

I have also found that the favorability of high intellectual abilities and talents is strongly promoted and encouraged by the former president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev (1991-2019). With the former president's approval, a network of specialized schools, an international university, and a highly competitive study abroad program are only available for students with exceptionally high merits. The Kazakhstani government financially support these projects, "Nazarbayev University accounts for a significant part of the total government spending", "Nazarbayev University is also extraordinarily well resourced compared to other universities in the country, with high-quality infrastructure and facilities" (OECD report, 2017, p. 24). (see Table 9).

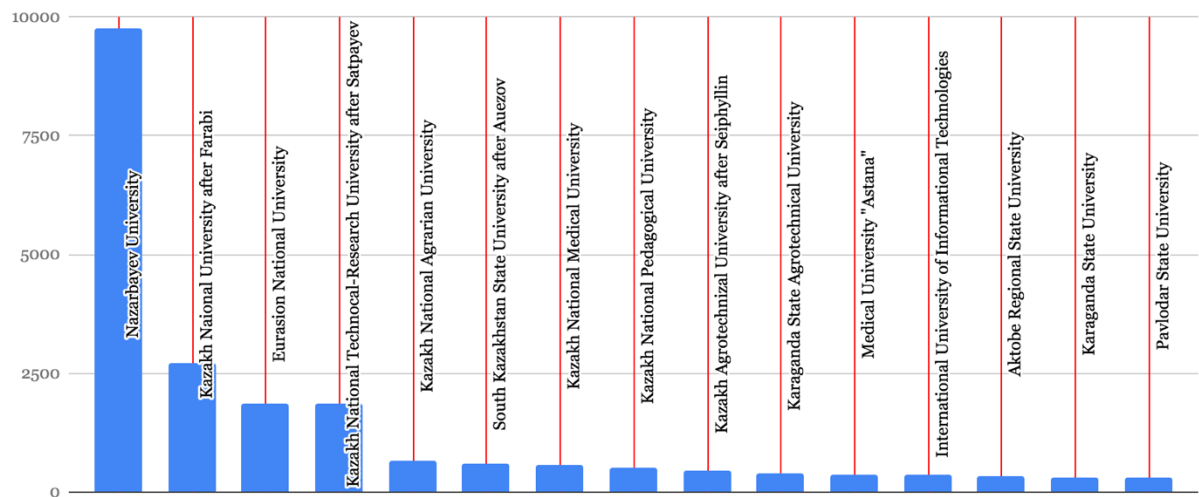
NU's admission policies built on the principle of merit. Contracting out the admissions to NU's entry-level foundation program (the Center for Preparatory Studies) to the University College of London (UCL), one of the strategic partners set the tone. This admissions process sent a strong signal to the citizens of Kazakhstan that NU was different. The message relayed was that NU was a university for all; any student, regardless of wealth, connections (or lack thereof), ethnicity or gender with sufficient academic achievements – and level of English – could and would be admitted to NU. (NU strategic plan 2011-2020)

Table 9

Top 15 universities in Kazakhstan, which made the most of educational grants from the government in 2017-2018.

	Amount of grants for Bachelor's	Average cost of one grant per year	Total amount of grants (million tenge)
Nazarbayev University	1470	6607	9750
Kazakh National University after Farabi	4146	655	2716
Eurasian National University	2830	655	1854
Kazakh National Technical- Research University after Satpayev	1128	655	1854
Kazakh National Agrarian University	1003	655	657
South Kazakhstan State University after Auezov	1504	395	595
Kazakh National Medical University	887	655	581
Kazakh National Pedagogical University	760	655	498
Kazakh Agrotechnical University after Seiphyllin	1137	395	450
Karaganda State Agrotechnical University	1021	395	404
Medical University "Astana"	934	395	369
International University of Informational Technologies	550	636	350
Aktobe Regional State University	860	395	340
Karaganda State University	783	395	310
Pavlodar State University	775	395	306

Top 15 universities in KZ, which made the most of educational grants from the government in 2017-2018



There are no data available to indicate how president-initiated secondary schools, university, and study-abroad program benefit students with low socio-economic status. I have found that Nazarbayev's elite education is a burden for the entire system as significantly more resources have been allocated to these projects. There is an exact issue with Kazakhstan's higher education system as it only supports and serves intellectually gifted students and prioritizes the president's initiated educational projects. Therefore, competition for state educational funding was a heritage of the Soviet education and has never been altered or modified with the introduction of the system based on liberty, diversity, and inclusion.

Absence of Need-Based Scholarships. The problems with merit-based aid raised in both reports. In particular, it was indicated that students with less advantaged backgrounds did not benefit from the state-wide merit-based aid. For example,

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. Given that about 84% of students currently pay tuition fees for public and private tertiary education, access for the less well-off who are unable to qualify for a government grant is an issue. A national survey finds 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 report, 2007, p. 64).

In the second assessment report by the OECD in 2017, the problems in relation to the strong emphasis on meritocracy had not been fixed. In particular, “in recognition of equity challenges inherent in a merit-based admissions system, the government has also stated its intention to introduce socio-economic criteria as a determinant of eligibility for free higher education (JSC Information-Analytic Center, 2015). At the time of writing, no further detail was available on these changes” (OECD report, 2017, p119). The evaluation of external agencies did not meet the assessment of the situation in the allocation of educational scholarship based on the students’ needs. In the annual address to the nation, Nazarbayev stated that “we have created we have created equal opportunities for education” (Nazarbayev – Strategy 2050, 2010, para. 16). Nevertheless, the results of the latest OECD reports have demonstrated a different picture when it comes to access to higher education institutions by the students with financial needs. Practically, the government is delusional, “the absence of needs-based financial aid is a major barrier to access to higher education in Kazakhstan. Students primarily pay for their education through personal funds and state grants. However, state grants only provide funding for around one-quarter of higher education students” (OECD report, 2017, p. 134).

STEM Prioritization

Neoliberalism in Kazakhstan’s higher education system has resulted in the strong emphasis on STEM education. In his speech, Nazarbayev indicated “I believe that first of all we should develop engineering professions, where talent is in very short supply and has to be attracted from abroad.” By stating this, Nazarbayev gave a strong push for the entire higher education system to prioritize STEM professions.

Kazakhstan has begun the dynamic advancement of STEM instruction. The evidence for this is the checked progress to the refreshed substance of school instruction inside the STEM setting inside the structure of the State program for training and science improvement for 2016-2019. The new instructive approach's execution involves the consideration of STEM-components in the educational program, intended to grow new advancements, logical development, numerical demonstrating.

Another interdisciplinary and venture-based way to deal with learning will be acquainted, which will permit understudies to fortify the exploration and logical and mechanical potential, to create abilities of basic, inventive, and imaginative reasoning, critical thinking, correspondence, and cooperation. The quantity of "cross-cutting topics" between science subjects will be expanded.

Beginning 2015-2016, each 1st-grade understudy considers the "Regular science" subject, which is why the investigation of characteristic sciences in higher evaluations.

Moreover, beginning from the 2016-2017 scholastic year, it is intended to start furnishing all schools with data and correspondence advances, computerized instructive assets, and admittance to the Internet.

Additionally, since 2019, the science subjects in senior classes will be concentrated in English, which will encourage new information in the first language and the passage into the global academic local area. Specific consideration is paid to the advancement of instructive mechanical technology in the country. For instance, the yearly Republican Olympiad on Robotics has been held in Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools since 2014. Since 2015, Karaganda has been facilitating the yearly International Festival of Robotics "RoboLand," which is additionally gone to by the agents of different nations.

In 2016, instructive mechanical technology labs started to open interestingly, and the first showed up in secondary school No 159 in Almaty. There are plans to open another 90 labs in different schools in the country in the nearest future. Encouraging staff is additionally being prepared: at this stage, 64 mentors were set up at the elective course "Robotics"

There is a positive encounter of worldwide collaboration in the field of STEM-training. For instance, a five-year Partnership program of the United Kingdom and Kazakhstan, "Newton - Al-Farabi," has been carried out since 2014 with an unlimited spending plan of 20 million pounds. The program's objective is the connection of two nations to fortify exploration and development potential, staff trade, and the formation of joint examination centers.

Accordingly, our nation is moving similar way with the created nations. STEM-schooling is the extension of training and profession. Its idea gets youngsters ready for the innovatively evolved world. Things need exhaustive preparation and information on various instructive territories of characteristic sciences, designing, innovation, and arithmetic.

Unified National Test

Instead of Soviet university entrance exam, Kazakhstani policymakers introduced a standardized test for all high school graduates called, Unified National Text (UNT). Every year, those students who graduate from Kazakhstan's comprehensive schools and want to enter university, have to pass the paper based UNT. According to the test results, students with high scores could apply for a state merit-based scholarship, "highly competitive Unified National Test, which replaced the old system of university entrance exams, and their subject choice." (OECD report, 2017, p. 88).

Liberalization and Democratization of Higher Education

The premise of the state strategy in the field of higher education in Kazakhstan is the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (1995). As per section 2, Article 30 of the Constitution "all residents will reserve the option to get free broad auxiliary, specialized and professional training, and on a serious premise a free post-optional, higher and post-advanced education given that the instruction at these levels is gotten unexpectedly".

The democratic nature of higher education is perceived as one of the first concerns in various vital documents: The Strategic Development Plan of Kazakhstan till 2020, the Development Strategy of Kazakhstan till 2050, the Law on Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (starting at 27/07/2007) and an updated adaptation of the Law (November 2015). Based on these reports, two State Programs of Education Development in Kazakhstan for 2005-2010 and for 2011-2020 have been made. In the latest and the most updated Law on education of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Article 3 about the principles of state policy in the field of education, it has been states that,

- the main principles of education are:
- equality of the rights of all citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan to receive education.
 - free of charge educational services within the limits of state education standards.
 - a variety of educational institutions by type of ownership, areas of activity, forms of education and training.
 - the continuity of the educational process, ensuring the continuity of its stages.
 - scientific nature, legal and environmental orientation of education.
 - advanced development of education.
 - democratic governance in the education system.
 - the secular nature of education in state educational institutions.
 - independence of education from political and ideological influences that impede the acquisition of objective knowledge (Law on Education 2007, article 3).

The latest law on education emphasizes equality, diversity, democratic governance in education, non-religious affiliation, and no political and ideological intervention, which can potentially interfere with the acquisition of objective knowledge and academic freedom.

The Strategic Development Plan of Kazakhstan till 2020 determines the public education system and its vital targets for the coming time frame. By 2020 radical modernization of all degrees of training - from preschool to advanced education - will be held. This will make conditions for getting new information and abilities at each degree of instruction just as for proficient improvement all through life. Getting ready qualified experts will be connected to plans for industrialization of the country. In higher education there will be a change to a framework that meets the necessities of the cutting-edge work market, and instructive projects will be shaped dependent on expert principles through the public capabilities' framework.

Higher education in Kazakhstan has based its major principles of freedom, equality, and democracy. In the Strategy Development 2050, the former president of the Republic of Kazakhstan indicated that education in Kazakhstan has equal opportunities for everyone,

we have created equal opportunities for education. Over the last 15 years our education expenditure has grown 9.5 times. We have implemented an Education Development Government Programme designed to radically modernize education at all levels, from pre-school to higher education. Thanks to our long-term human capital investment policy, we have created a talented new generation of young people. (Kazakhstan strategy development 2050).”

Student Choice

After independence, there was a need for funding students' participation in the neoliberalization of the Kazakhstani higher education system. As tuition charges began, the government provided students with educational grants and loans in a competitive and merit-based system. Following the premises of neoliberalism, educational grants and loans are given

directly to students, not to universities: “students receive voucher-like education grants that they carry with them to the public or private institution of their choice, so long as they choose to study a grant-carrying subject” (OECD report, 2017, p. 88). That is, the grants and loans are transportable, and students can spend the grants and loans at the university of their choice (Law on Education 2007).

free higher education is available on a competitive basis only when the individual is participating for the first time at a particular level. Public educational grants give selected students access to the institution of their choice, and the major share of grants are allocated to state education institutions. (OECD report, 2017, p. 134).

Voucher Type Funding

the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan offers voucher type educational funding to give students choices in what school they can attend. Students receive funds to use toward the cost of public and private universities. The typical scholarship amount of a voucher varies, but it almost always falls short of the cost of university tuition and monthly stipend. Voucher programs have been around since the early 1990s. Specifically, “Kazakhstan’s state grants are a voucher-type system. Funds for higher education places are allocated to the recipient (the student), rather than the supplier of education services (the institution).” (OECD report, 2017, p. 134).

Only a small fraction of students could receive voucher type education grants to use it at the university of their own choice. The eligibility is determined by an extremely challenging standardized testing system, which all high school leavers have to take. According to the results of the test, students with high scores keep an opportunity to obtain full financial aid from the government.

depending on the year, between 15 and 20% of the students receive voucher-like education grants that they carry with them to the public or private institution of their choice, so long as they choose to study a grant-carrying subject. For the students, eligibility is determined by their score in the highly competitive Unified National Test, which replaced the old system of university entrance exams, and their subject choice. (OECD report, 2017, p. 88).

Targeted Social Support

Neoliberalism has changed the way government provide support for the people of Kazakhstan. Low living standards and the scarcity of public resources have pushed countries experiencing significant change to rethink how effectively target those in need. Specifically, the targeted educational grants are available for students to enter country's most prestigious and competitive secondary schools and higher education establishments.

the educational grant of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan - the Leader of the Nation of “Әркем” (further “Әркем” grant) - the grant established by the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan for payment of training of intellectually gifted children in specialized educational organizations “Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools” (Law on Education 2007).

Not only students with intellectual high capabilities can obtain government educational funding. In particular, students with disabilities have a right to study for free at universities. Also, students people debilitated from adolescence, impaired kids, aul (town) youth and the people of the Kazakh identity." that are not the residents of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and stranded kids and youngsters without parental help.

the acceptance rate is the limited state educational order, including the educational grants assigned for acceptance to the educational organizations, allowing technical and professional, postsecondary and higher education for the persons with disability of I, II groups, the persons equated by privileges and guarantees to participants and persons who became disabled as a result of participation in the Great Patriotic War, persons disabled from childhood, disabled children, aul (village) youth and the persons of the Kazakh nationality.” that are not the citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and also orphaned children and children without parental support; (Law on Education 2007).

State Educational Scholarships for Disadvantaged Students

Kazakhstani legislation has given a special attention to support students with disabilities. According to the Law on Education, handicapped students have equal rights to obtain quality higher education in Kazakhstan. Moreover, universities that accept students with disabilities have an obligation to provide them with all necessary accommodation.

2.5. Inclusive education providing equal opportunities for people with disabilities for high quality education is one of six principles of development of Kazakhstan.”

the issues of social responsibility in the sphere of education are regulated by the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Education". “The state, realizing the goals of inclusive education, provides citizens with disabilities in development with special conditions for their education, correction of developmental disorders and social adaptation at all levels of education” (Article 8. “State guarantees in the field of education”). At the legislative level, it is designated- "State compulsory education standards are developed taking into account inclusive education" (Law on Education, 2007, Article 56).

for disabled persons of the first and second groups and children with disabilities upon admission to study in educational organizations that implement professional training programs of technical and vocational, post-secondary and higher education, an admission quota is provided in the amount determined by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Article 29 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Social Protection of Disabled People in the Republic of Kazakhstan ").

The Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 264 of February 28, 2012 "On the approval of the size of the admission quota for admission to study in educational organizations that implement educational programs of technical and vocational, post-secondary and higher education" established the following norms:

citizens from among invalids of I, II groups, invalids from childhood, children with disabilities upon admission to universities - 1%.

- persons equated in benefits and guarantees to the participants and invalids of the Great Patriotic War - 0.5%.
- citizens from among rural youth in specialties that determine the socio-economic development of the village - 30%.

- persons of Kazakh nationality who are not citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan (oralmans) - 4%.
- orphans and children left without parental care, as well as citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan from among young people who have lost or are left without parental care until the age of majority - 1%.
- Citizens from among rural youth moving to the regions determined by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan - 10%.

In accordance with the Resolution of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated February 7, 2008 No. 116 "On approval of the Rules for the appointment, payment and amount of state scholarships to students in educational institutions", visually impaired, hearing impaired, orphans and children left without parental care and under guardianship, are eligible for an increased state scholarship.

The state program for the development of education and science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2016-2019 defines the indicator of the social responsibility of universities. The share of Kazakhstani universities that have created conditions for inclusive education should be 100% by 2020.

Table 10

Share of Children with Disabilities and Share of Schools which Have Favorable Conditions for Students with Disabilities.

Indicator	2010	2015	2020
Share of children covered with inclusive education of the total number of children with developmental disabilities	9 %	25%	50%
Share of schools which created	10%	30%	70%

favorable conditions for inclusive education (out of the schools' total number);			
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Exit Communism

To answer my second research question of national political priorities and critical decisions made by the first presidents of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, I have examined his books, such as “From right to left”, “The Kazakhstan way”, and his official speeches from 1997 to 2019. In this regard, it was essential to me to understand where Nazarbayev’s zeal for the market economy came from. After conducting a thorough analysis of all documentation published by Nazarbayev during his multiple presidential terms, I can conclude that although he did not run Kazakhstan’s national economy exclusively according to Anglo-American free market principles, he nonetheless acknowledged the importance of private-sector-driven economic growth in increasingly globally integrated markets.

Nazarbayev began his neoliberal idea-inspired political, economic, and social reforms in Kazakhstan from the dawn of independence, focusing on efficiently changing the former Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic “from a planned to a market economy, from despotism to liberal governmental issues” (Nazarbayev 2007, p. 10). He envisioned a strong presidential framework to be established in the political system of independent Kazakhstan. In the current section of the dissertation, I would like to address the second research question about Nazarbayev’s national political priorities and critical decisions have influenced higher education in Kazakhstan (see Table 11).

Table 11

National Political Priorities and Critical Decisions Made by the Former President of the Republic of Kazakhstan

National Political Priorities	Critical Decisions
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Transition from resource-based development to knowledge economy Innovation-based economy	The establishment of a world class university to produce graduates for new professions. New professions to satisfy the needs of market economy. Educational loans, saving systems.
Investment in human capital	Bolashak scholarship. Nazarbayev University. Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools.
Tridiagonalization	Legislation. Harmonization of education (teaching 10 th , 11 th grades in English). Attract international scholars. International partnership. National identity, Kazakh language, textbooks (Unity of Three Languages)
Privatization of state enterprises	25 Universities Joint Stock Companies. Private-public partnership (PPP)
Competitiveness	Public and private universities Merit-based aid Elite and highly selective schools Vocational and technical education

Nazarbayev knew from the beginning that implementation of new reforms would generate active backlash among people who strongly supported communism and centralism of the Soviet system “many did not understand us. The Supreme Soviet and its leadership requested a review of individual principal positions, arguing that the people were not yet ready to take on such ideas” (Nazarbayev, 2010, p.20). Nevertheless, Nazarbayev was stubborn about introducing a new political and economic model. He did not conceal from people that they would have to go through pain and suffering to achieve economic stability after independence “there would be

many unemployed and malcontent people (omitted) most obviously they would accuse all of us of all sins, me first and foremost” (Nazarbayev, 1994, p.89).

Eradication of Communist Mentality

For the older generation, born and raised in the USSR, or so-called “Soviet” people, it was exceptionally complicated to accept a new market economy’s logic. The government was a central organization that took care of people. In 2010 Nazarbayev delivered the presidential address to the nation and emphasized,

a process characteristic of a post-totalitarian period will begin in the republic to delimit political and economic power and surmount the state’s absolute monopoly of property. The latter will be seen in the more active privatization and the introduction of sufficiently effective and substantial non-state forms of property in the formation of a solid middle stratum of private owners, bringing stability to economic development and society as a whole. This stratum will facilitate the removal from the society of such negative phenomena as parasitic tendencies – the habit calling upon the authorities for social aid and assistance in times of economic hardship. (Nazarbayev, 2010, p.22).

Kazakhstan gained political independence but much attention in Nazarbayev’s speeches and writings were dedicated to achieving economic independence. Economic independence required a realization of new economic reforms, such as “intensive development of the private sector and competition” (Nazarbayev, 1994, p.10). To establish new economic system, Nazarbayev encouraged each citizen to take proactive actions in one of the addresses delivered to the nation, Nazarbayev clearly stated that to accommodate new realities, people of Kazakhstan should also transform their perceptions and mentalities of a government unprecedented social support,

our mentality is shaped up by several generations of people who were brought up in the spirit of Communist principles. Some people enthusiastically took advantage of recent changes, but quite many didn’t. People are influenced by subjective and objective factors; they are slow to adapting themselves to eventual

changes. As of old, they are waiting for assistance to be rendered on the part of the state in solving their problems. (Nazarbayev, 1997, para 39).

Parasitism

This particular security in social benefits provided by the Soviet government was a critical factor for the opponents of Nazarbayev's new plan. As a part of the collective system, Soviet people took advantage of guaranteed free access to education, secured employment after graduation, and others. Nazarbayev, conversely, expressed incredible frustration toward the government's social obligation to support people and described this process as "parasitic tendencies – the habit of calling upon authorities for social aid and assistance in times of economic hardship" (Nazarbayev, 2010, p.22)

Tragedy Associated with the Collapse of the USSR

In a year after the speech, Nazarbayev again underscored the major pillars of neoliberal philosophy in his address, "it is transformation to more open, a more competitive, and more honest society" (Nazarbayev, 1998, para 47). For many people, the collapse of the Soviet Union was a disaster and tragedy. Still, Nazarbayev also saw an opportunity to introduce market reforms, including radical reforms to the higher education system. With a new market system based upon competition and self-reliance, people in Kazakhstan faced uncertainties as to how to navigate in novel realities. During the turbulent times in 1991, the first president of the Republic of Kazakhstan appeared in the political arena with an obvious agenda of transforming Kazakhstan into a market-driven economy.

Opposite to the old communistic system that existed for almost 70 years, the new market system, recommended by Nazarbayev, provided no guarantees unless you were prepared to compete to achieve the desired level of living standards. At the dawn of independence,

Nazarbayev accepted the fact that transitioning to a new economic system would be extremely challenging for people living in Kazakhstan. In one of his writings, he argued,

but in the transition period, when there is a significant stratification of living standards and, for most of the populace, the move towards the market system being related to more sacrifice than to improve well-being, one should be understanding people's negative attitude toward the reforms being implemented. The non-acceptance of the market is due to the explicable powerlessness of people who are unfamiliar with market realities and who do not have practical skills for the new conditions (Nazarbayev, 1993, p. 17).

In this regard, Nazarbayev suggests convincing people about market reforms' effectiveness and the creation of "mass approval base for market ideology" (Nazarbayev, 1993, p.18).

Shock and Fear. Blank State

An analogy for the profound transformations that occurred in the system of higher education in Kazakhstan could be comprehended through Kuhn's (1962) paradigm shift phenomenon. As Kuhn (1962) asserted, "paradigm shifts arise when the dominant paradigm under which normal science operates is rendered incompatible with new phenomena, facilitating the adoption of a new theory or paradigm" (p.46). Kuhn's fundamental concept of scientific paradigm shift pertains to a political paradigm shift from a centrally planned communistic policy in the Soviet Union to a market-based Western-like economic system with a distinct emphasis on privatization and individual rights. The successful adaptation of an alternative economic system required a so-called "revolution" or "shock therapy" to occur in the Soviet Republics to accept prescribed neoliberal policies developed by the Western capitalist states (Klein, 2010). The paradigm shift from a planned to a market economy also required ideological transformations as for almost 70 years of the Soviet Union's existence; Soviet people had inevitably saturated the ideas of collectivism and the government's unprecedented social support. Social support in

Soviet Kazakhstan was provided in the areas of education, medicine, accommodation, employment, and others. As a personal example of social support in Soviet Kazakhstan, the government granted a five-bedroom apartment for my family because my mother gave birth to four children. In Soviet times, families with three children and more were eligible to receive free accommodation and to privatize it.

Kuhn's "paradigm shift" and Klein's (2006) "shock therapy" concepts promptly unfold and explain how new "norms" impacted by an alternative market system have affected the higher education system in Kazakhstan. As Klein (2006) ascertains in her book, the post-socialist camp accepted neoliberal prescribed packages via shock doctrine or shock therapy. Shock therapy was extensively used in treating patients with mental disorders. With CIA funding to support his treatment approach for people with psychologically damaged disorders, a prominent American psychiatrist Cameron performed extensive experiments with electroshock treatment, where electric current is passed through a patient to induce seizures (Klein, 2006.) This treatment put patients in the child-like condition or, as Klein (2006) described, a "blank state." Similar concepts were applied to the countries that were part of the Soviet Union. The collapse of a super-powerful dominant empire put Kazakhstan in a "blank state" with each part of the key industries, such as construction, agriculture, education, health care, etc., to collapse one after another. The centralized government fell apart as centralized funding for higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. During the economic, social, and ideological crisis, Nazarbayev stepped up as a president of Kazakhstan with seemingly rescuing policy alternatives, which had to be adapted immediately.

Survival after Communism. Positive market economy rhetoric is ubiquitous in Nazarbayev's speeches that are analyzed for the current research. Nazarbayev expressed his deep

adherence and dedication to the market system policies' potential success in independent Kazakhstan. The higher education system is not an exception. Educational laws, reforms, programs, and strategic plans that I used to conduct the current analysis are full of neoliberal influences. As a result, in this chapter, I will try to present how the Kazakh higher education system has changed and evolved under the neoliberal policies that were guided and promoted by the first president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev (1991-2019). A political paradigm shift occurred immediately after the dissolution of the USSR (1936-1991) through the introduction of educational laws, reforms, and programs to adjust to a new market economy.

Transition to a Market Economy.

Nazarbayev became a president of independent Kazakhstan on December 1st, 1991. He was the only one candidate in the first presidential election held after the dissolution of the USSR. Since the early days of independence, Nazarbayev vocally expressed his economic, political, and social agenda for the future development of the country. His major agenda was (a) the attraction of foreign investors, (b) creating a safe and comfortable environment for the private sector functioning, (c) developing alternative and diverse economic systems not solely dependent on natural resources, (d) building a national identity with an emphasis on Kazakh traditions and our historic and cultural uniqueness but also willing to adopt Western ideas while keeping national Kazakh identity.

In 1992 Nazarbayev announced a strategy of development of a sovereign Kazakhstan, called "Kazakhstan Strategy – 2030. In this strategic document, Nazarbayev recognized that to implement quality social and political reforms, it was crucial to stabilize the economy and to ensure continued socio-economic development. Centered on the concept of freedom and openness, the 2030 strategy consistently reaffirms president Nazarbayev's neoliberal claims that

an open and free market and democracy is the path to prosperity, freedom, and success for each and every individual of Kazakhstan (Nazarbayev, 1997).

Kazakhstan's economy was created as a component part of the complex economic system of the Soviet Union and was highly dependent on the extraction of natural resources. The separation from the Soviet Union brought social, economic, and political problems. In this respect, extremely disastrous economic situations in Kazakhstan in the 1990s demanded effective solutions. Nazarbayev strongly believed that he was a leader who was able to get the Kazakhstani people out of the crisis.

These documents were critical for two significant reasons. To start with, they were distributed when the new Kazakh state was in the pains of an enormous consequential convulsion in all circles from the breakdown of the previous Soviet Union, a noteworthy second that adjusted both world legislative issues and the arches spasm situation. Kazakhstan had a desperate need to haul itself out of these emergencies and gain a firm traction as an autonomous country.

Nazarbayev's political writings and speeches were important in setting the bearing for managing difficulties also, for short-, medium-, and long-haul state arrangements on the turn of events of recently autonomous post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Utilizing the grounded theory's constant comparison comprehension of neoliberalism, writing and speech examination of his compositions in the entries that follow will show that neoliberalism had a ground-breaking influence in President Nazarbayev's conceptualization and development of the new public personality to be expected by post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Neoliberalism additionally affects the reasonings and the legitimization of his arrangement solutions and comparing activity plans for how the new Kazakhstan and her kin ought to carry on in its post-Soviet time.

“Strong Presidential Power and Energetic Economic Reforms”

Kazakhstan’s first president holds an official title, called “Elbasy”, which means “the ruler of the state”. Although he resigned in 2019, he still holds this title. Elbasy was the head of the state from 1991 and resigned in 2019. He was one of the longest-ruling non-royal related leaders in the world. In 1991, after the breakdown of the world’s most powerful state, Kazakhstan held the first ever presidential election in its history. Overall, he governed Kazakhstan for about 28 years. During such long presidential terms, Nazarbayev implemented major political, economic, and social reforms. In his book, *The Kazakhstan’s Way*, Nazarbayev admitted that Kazakhstan has a rather unique model of economic and political transformation. Nazarbayev described the model as an amalgamation of strong presidential power and rapid, energetic economic reforms. Nazarbayev is a strong believer in effective leadership. In *the Kazakhstan Way*, the former president stated that “one could retort that every state has a different starting position. The specific geography, economic development, past experience and people’s mindsets all influence the outcome of reforms and end results. However, in my opinion, it is not always objective reasons that play the most crucial role here much depends on the subjective qualities of the leaders of these countries” (Nazarbayev, 2010, p. 14). As an example, the economic and political successes of France in the 19th century and Singapore in the 20th century, Nazarbayev attributed to strong and effective leadership of Charles de Gaulle, the former French president, and Lee Kwan Yew, the founding father of Singapore.

In his address to the nation in 1998, Nazarbayev expressed a similar narrative regarding the powerful and effective leadership styles. In fact, in one of Nazarbayev’s books, he discussed that unlike other countries, which are still experiencing economic hardships, civil wars, stagnation, and high unemployment rates, Kazakhstan successfully went through a tough

transitional period after the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. due to “strong presidential power plus, energetic economic reform” (Nazarbayev, 2010, p.9).

Nazarbayev’s first book, *A Strategy for the Development of Kazakhstan* as a Sovereign State, was expressly expected to give a drawn-out vision with explicit strides for short-and medium-term plans for the turn of events of free Kazakhstan. Directly from the earliest starting point of the book, he calls attention to the accompanying rules that he continues in his change systems for the new Kazakhstan:

social, political, and financial relations will be changed. They are Getting progressively more open. The advancement of vote-based system, property rights change and the development toward an undeniable market framework have been perceived as the sole methods for lifting the economy out of emergency also, are establishing an atmosphere helpful for the ascent of a country state. (Nazarbayev 1994, p. 4)

This is an explanation that is outlined with neoliberal way of talking, beliefs, and reasoning. Words, for example, “open,” “majority rules system,” “property rights,” and “market framework” are almighty etymological instruments in the logical munitions stockpile of neoliberalism for the advancement and legitimization of its market-focused messages. These ideas mean a neoliberal conviction in the ideals of a free and open society and in the unregulated economy. Portraying them as the “sole signifies” for financial advancement and success is an obvious philosophical case that is conveyed to legitimize constantly a particularly neoliberal way, while front slowing down other potential other options.

Nazarbayev envisioned a strong presidential framework to be introduced in the political system of post-Soviet Kazakhstan. He emphasized the political stability, freedom, autonomy, and self-determination of the Kazakh people as principal political targets. Aside from these common

political goals, president Nazarbayev invoked the following democratic political fundamental principles as an integral part of newly formed post-Socialist state:

This present content's conjuring of essential standards of political progressiveness, for example, singular equity, majority rule government, common liberties, and opportunity, and worldwide financial coordination obviously shows a solid impact of neoliberalism in Nazarbayev's vision for the political framework the new Kazakhstan was to accomplish. The estimation of these liberal standards is taken as plainly obvious, and they are utilized as an incredible legitimization for the need to make a solid official framework as the assurance of their usage.

Neoliberal's Devoted Advocate

After the collapse of the powerful and dominant state, the Kazakhstani state and Kazakh people desperately needed a leader who would lead the whole country forward independently. Ideological, economic, and social transformations demanded strong leadership with a political agenda to restore and rescue the country from the crisis. Arguably, Nazarbayev was chosen as a leader and a guide to conduct the most comprehensive and risky changes in each part of Kazakhstan's industries. In 1998's presidential address to the nation, Nazarbayev started his speech with this, "come to you at a fateful time." (Nazarbayev, 1998, para.1). Why did he start from this sentence? – This question popped up in my mind. It seemed to me that the president attempted to underscore his importance and maybe prophecy. When I was getting familiar with the messages of the Prophet Muhammad, I remember he employed strikingly similar phrases to deliver his message to people.

When I was a higher school student in Kazakhstan, it was a part of the curriculum to study the president's biography, school years, college life, and how, from an average Kazakh

youngster, he became the president of the country. As a child and as an adult, I consistently expressed a deep appreciation for him. I learned to respect the president from the school and from my mom because my mom remains a devoted fan of him. With these thoughts in mind, I started uttering the speech.

Since my research is based upon grounded theory, I conducted the speech analysis relying on Charmaz's (2006) constructive data analysis techniques. Charmaz (2006) is considered a novice grounded theory methodology as she formulated a modern vision to grounded theory by utilizing the constructivist paradigm. Charmaz indicated a researcher ought to develop a very close bond with data to deliver his/her voice via data analysis. I find Charmaz's constructivist vision to grounded theory remarkably effective, as I cannot distance myself from the data. As a result, when I was acquainted with the president's speech, I attempted to internalize the data and processed it by finding a connection with my own life experience.

As Charmaz (2006) suggests, at the initial stage of data analysis, I read the speech and did my best to distance myself from my own biases and expectations. An initial reading of the speech provided some ideas to me. After a simple initial reading, I downloaded the text to the NVivo computer-based text analysis program to perform a deductive analysis. I was exclusively looking for codes like privatization or private or privatize. Put differently, I was expecting various versions of the word *private*. To my surprise, I did not observe many of them. In this speech, I came across four words, which I coded as *private*. As the second deductive code, I looked for various compete, competition, and competitive. Like code *private*, I was able to code only three sentences where the word *competition* was present. My other deductive codes, human capital, and knowledge economy were a mission to my surprise.

Inductive reasoning turned out more enjoyable. This is one reason I really like applying grounded theory to my research because it relies on emerging codes. After initial coding and before deductive reading, the president's constant examples from western countries captured my attention first. The initial sentence of the speech occupied my attention immediately. I read the entire speech before I engaged in deductive coding. President liked to use various proverbs, or the words of wisdom, how he sometimes called them within the speech. Some of them are from the Kazakh culture, some of them international. The president constantly referred to the international experience of a democratic society.

The scheme that was abandoned provided more stable minimum social benefits and was competitive in a variety of ways. However, it is important to remember that this system failed because it proved to be economically uncompetitive. It clearly failed on a social level as well because most people's living standards lagged those in other countries. In one of his speeches, Nazarbayev stated,

sure enough, the discarded system offered more secure minimum social benefits and was a success in a number of fields. However, we must remember that this system fell apart because it proved to be noncompetitive from an economic point of view. It obviously failed on the social level too because living standards of the most people lagged those abroad. Likewise, it meant frustration with reference to a man as a personality who was denied basic freedoms. With time our own experience is sure to prove that a free-market economy and democratically elected government can bring prosperity and freedom to Kazakhstan. During the transition period our citizens have suffered much and sacrificed just as much. Yet, we do all this not only for our own benefit but for the benefit of our children and grandchildren, first and foremost (Nazarbayev, 1997, para. 14).

“Private Sector is More Effective”. In his strategy of the development of Kazakhstan until the year of 2050, Nazarbayev (2012) speculated that “private businesses are normally more effective than state run enterprises” (para. 45). Private sector is an essential and the most

important segment of the neoliberal economy. In his speeches, Nazarbayev acknowledged this fact and tried to accommodate the private sector into the economy and its effective development.

With the president's decision to establish a private sector, specifically private universities in Kazakhstan, more and more students choose to study at them. "The share of students studying in private institutions has not fallen. In fact, it has increased." (OECD report, 2017, p. 34).

Human Capital

As evidenced in the number of documents, the strategic direction of higher education in Kazakhstan is clearly influenced by the President's office (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development report, 2017). Specifically, in the number of official speeches to Kazakhstan people, Nazarbayev devoted a great attention to the reforms in the system of higher education. In his speeches, Nazarbayev discussed the importance of improving human capital by investing in education and transferring from a resource-based to a knowledge-based economy through the implementation of rigorous reforms and policies in higher education. In the strategy of the development of Kazakhstan until 2050, the former president of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev stated, "Kazakhstan's oil and gas complex remains the powerhouse of our economy, which facilitates the growth of other sectors." We have successfully created a modern and efficient oil, gas, and mining sector. Our success in this area will help us to build a new economy of the future." The country's leadership projected to extensively use worldwide gas revenues to facilitate the transition to more advanced economies towards greater dependence on knowledge and expertise.

Elitism

Indeed, since his accession to the power in 1991, Nazarbayev has placed entrepreneurship at the core of the national economic vision relying on a comprehensive neoliberal transformation

program. This has been exemplified by, inter alia, widespread decentralization practices reaching the corporate governance structures along with new national laws and economic reforms to facilitate privatization and foreign investment. Meanwhile, Nazarbayev has established institutional platforms to assemble the political and economic elites loyal to the regime and regime-promoted neoliberal policies. The success of Nazarbayev's neoliberal political and economic agenda depended upon how loyal people would be to new changes. Those, who were not loyal to Nazarbayev's agenda based upon neoliberal policies, stayed in ignorance.

Nazarbayev attributed opposite perspectives towards his developing regime to the legacy of the Soviets, in particular, to people with the old Communist mindset. In the words of Nazarbayev,

when speaking about negative features of our present-day reality, one should make note of the fact that many of our weak points are of temporary and transitory nature, rather they result from Soviet legacy and hardships of the arduous transition period. Our mentality is shaped up by several generations of people who were brought up in the spirit of Communist principles. Some people enthusiastically took advantage of recent changes, but quite many didn't. People are influenced by subjective and objective factors; they are slow to adapting themselves to eventual changes. As of old, they are waiting for assistance to be rendered on the part of the state in solving their problems (Nazarbayev, 1991, para.7)

Following the neoliberal dogma, Nazarbayev established elite education that highly promoted competition and intellectual giftedness. In Law on Education 2007, section 61 is stated, "the elite education is the education using specialized education and training programs, realized in the specialized educational organizations for intellectually gifted children". As I raised the issues related to gifted children in Kazakhstan earlier in this writing, there is still much research and recommendations have to be done to change the direction of Kazakhstani higher education policy and priorities. In this part of my dissertation, I argued that elite education created by Nazarbayev was unable to promote social equality and social lift.

Bolashak Scholarship

Nazarbayev initiated and promoted the idea of developing the intellectual life of the country. In his 2011 presidential Address, Nazarbayev emphasized, “the personal credo of every citizen of Kazakhstan should be life-long education”. The transitioning to the economic system based on competition and self-reliance demanded new specialists. Instead of hiring foreign consultants, Nazarbayev decided to send Kazakhs to the U.S., U.K., and other developed countries to gain Western knowledge. Nazarbayev’s educational projects, including Bolashak scholarship, are highly competitive in nature.

Encouraging sophisticated, critically-thinking, Western-influenced, young adults who will innovate and build Kazakhstan’s human and economic capital may destabilize rather than stabilize Kazakhstan’s movement from an autocratic, resource-based economy to an individualistic, neoliberal, knowledge economy. This Western education, which is promoted significantly by the Bolashak Scholarship Program, will support democratic values that will undermine Kazakhstan’s traditional culture and autocratic leaning.

In 1993, the former president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev initiated a state-funded international scholarship, called the “Bolashak” Scholarship (Bolashak means “future” in Kazakh), for Kazakhstani students to pursue education in the world’s most prestigious universities in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, China, Australia, and other countries. Since then, over 10,000 Kazakh students have studied abroad, earned degrees, and returned to Kazakhstan to fulfill the scholarship obligations to serve the nation (Kucera, 2014). According to Bolashak requirements, recipients of the scholarship must maintain a high-Grade Point Average (at least 3.0) during their studies and graduate on time. After graduation, Bolashak Scholars must return to Kazakhstan within 25 days unless special conditions exist related to their education.

After returning to Kazakhstan, Bolashak Scholars are obligated to work in the country for 5 years and to submit employment verification to the government every 6 months.

Brain-Drain. Since the creation, Bolashak scholarship has given the opportunity to obtain education abroad for many Kazakhstani citizens. In the first years, due to extremely low living standards in Kazakhstan after independence, some Bolashak scholars remained in the country of their education. This issue has been fixed by implementing additional requirements for the scholars. To increase effectiveness of the program, Bolashak scholars have an obligation to return to Kazakhstan and to work within the country for the minimum of five years.

there has been considerable concern about the “brain drain” that may occur as a consequence of Bolashak recipients’ experiences abroad. Award conditions require that a scholarship only be given to an applicant who provides collateral property equivalent to the value of the scholarship or provides up to four guarantors who will assume financial liability for the government’s investment should the recipient not return to Kazakhstan. Upon completion of their study abroad, recipients must work in Kazakhstan in the discipline of their degree for five years. (OECD report, 2017, p. 169).

Geographic brain drain happens when capable experts escape one country for another. Educating students in democratic states inevitably brings Western liberal values and constitutes challenges for authoritarian ruling republics like Kazakhstan. Western education tends to emphasize critical thinking, which Kazakh students can apply to challenge the Kazakh government for corruption and systemic oppression.

New Leaders. Upon returning to Kazakhstan, the Bolashak Scholars experience a “reverse culture shock.” (Del Sordi, 2017, p. 220). Western liberal education with the emphasis on critical thinking and the freedom of expression allows the possibility of developing highly intellectual, liberal rebels and oppositional activists. A clear paradox exists as the government orders the most capable, young, intellectual elites to pursue education abroad, which could

ultimately grow an opposition force to the current system of leadership. Nevertheless, since the creation of the program, few Bolashak Scholars have been involved in the criticism of the authoritarian state structure. Bolashak Graduates tend to be promoted to leadership positions in the government body. Those who comply with the regime become successful and influential political figures in Kazakhstan, “among the graduates of the program there are 4 vice-ministers, 5 city akims, 3 deputy city and regional akims, 81 chief executives of government agencies, 106 chief executive officers and board members of national companies and banks. “Bolashak” graduates of 2015 mostly work in state bodies (54.5%) and in the private sector” (National report on the state development of the educational system of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015, p. 81).

However, the Bolashak Scholars Program to grow the infrastructure for the current Kazakhstani, authoritarian-leaning power system paradoxically plants the seeds of that system’s own opposition. Bolashak scholars who are not in government positions are sometimes outspoken and civically engaged leaders who establish human rights organizations that involve the protection of women and children, anti-discrimination efforts based on gender, transformation of the judicial system, and anti-corruption agencies. The paradoxical message seems to be the following: develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills to innovate and create capital value for companies and the government but do not apply those skills to the larger Kazakhstani socio-political system. I do not argue that Nazarbayev established study-abroad scholarship under the neoliberal pressure, but it was a necessary measure to promote and maintain neoliberal ideology in Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev needed people in Kazakhstan who would share his beliefs in competition, individualism, and self-reliance. Educational projects created by Nazarbayev fully respond to the principles of neoliberalism.

Expensive Educational Projects

Nazarbayev also initiated a chain of secondary schools for students aged 5-18. Currently, there are over 20 specialized intellectual schools across the country. All these schools hold the name of the former president. Nazarbayev intellectual schools are highly selective. As other Nazarbayev projects, acceptance to the schools is based upon highly competitive examination process, “the most gifted students can attend the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools: 0.4% of the total general secondary student population is enrolled at these special schools, which receive much more funding than mainstream schools” (OECD report, 2017, p.55).

There is also an enormous issue with these types of schools as oftentimes they neglect students with disadvantaged backgrounds. As other similar projects, Nazarbayev intellectual schools are highly expensive. According to Kazakhstan’s republican budget for 2020-2022, “more than 25 billion 416 million tenge of state funds are provided for Nazarbayev’s Intellectual Schools this year. About 1.6 million tenge will be allocated for each of the more than 15,000 NIS students in the country. According to the Financial Centre of the Ministry of Education and Science, “this year for one secondary school in the country allocated six times less funds – about 270,000 tenge “. While NIS is funded 6 times more than ordinary public secondary schools in Kazakhstan, the OECD review team concludes,

Kazakhstan’s public spending for education stood at 3.6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014, with spending for education representing about one-tenth of this, or 0.3% of GDP. In absolute terms, public education spending stood at about KZT 133 billion, or roughly USD 400 million at mid-2016 exchange rates. These levels of investment as a percentage of GDP are substantially lower than in many peer countries and far below the average investment in OECD countries. (OECD report, 2017, p. 242).

Another educational project regarded as “elite” and initiated by Nazarbayev is Nazarbayev University (NU). Similarly, it holds the name of the first president of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Like other projects, NU is highly selective and highly financially prioritized.

When it comes to Nazarbayev's projects, there is no evidence to indicate that access to elite schools and universities is equal other than internal documents of Nazarbayev university,

to continue its journey to global recognition, the NU of the future must also hold true to its core values:

For the university these are:

- Research – driven by intellectual curiosity – seeking local and global impact.
 - Embracing diversity – integrated into every aspect of education, research, and community.
 - Equal access to education – regardless of race, religion, gender, physical capacity, or socioeconomic status.
 - Merit-based institution open to all talented and bright students, faculty, and researchers.
 - Instilling Integrity in teaching, administration, and student life.
 - Professionalism and high ethical principles for students, faculty, and researchers.
 - Transparency and openness, public access to all aspects of university operations.
- (NU strategy 2018-2030, p. 24).

Full Financial Coverage

Like other educational projects, initiated by Nazarbayev, Bolashak scholarship is on the forefront in the educational budget. In fact, the most expensive educational projects in Kazakhstan are all linked to Nazarbayev. As evidenced in the number of documents, president-initiated projects enjoy full financial coverage. Specifically, in Bolashak example all study-related costs are covered, including housing, book allowances, medical tuition fees, insurance, travel expenses, entry visas and other processing fees, and application fees. Despite the current downturn in input costs, Kazakhstan's government reports that the high-cost yet potentially promising program will be continued – though the number of students sponsored could differ.

Bolashak scholarships cover all study-related costs: accommodation expenses, book allowances, medical tuition fees, insurance, travel expenses, entry visas and other registration costs, and application fees. The programme is administered by the Center for International Programmes, a government owned entity that was created specifically to manage the scholarships and is overseen by the Ministry of Education and Science. Despite the current slump in resource prices, the government reports that Kazakhstan will continue this high-cost but potentially

promising programme – although the numbers of students who are supported may vary. (OECD report, 2017, p. 168).

Youth Policy

Throughout Nazarbayev's speeches, I found an intriguing theme about young citizens. To be specific, it was clear that Nazarbayev, as a premier promoter of a neoliberal philosophy in independent Kazakhstan, needed an overwhelming support of the Kazakhstan population. In the speeches, Nazarbayev particularly underscored the significance of the younger generation to introduce and implement market reforms in all key Kazakh industries. In this sense, higher education was a key tool to prepare and provide necessary skills to navigate in new realities. Nazarbayev has always expressed a deep connection to competition and merits,

I would like to make a special address to our youth. My announcement today of a new political and economic course aims to provide you with the best possible education, which will mean an even better future. I rely on you, the new generation of Kazakhstan. You should become a powerhouse of this policy. As the Head of State, I have done my best to provide you with all the necessary conditions for your education and growth. I have created a world class University, intellectual school and established the Bolashak programme. The new concept of a Youth State Policy is underway. All the conditions for success will be created for you. (Nazarbayev, 2000, para.16).

The Nazarbayev-era trends in higher education were not repulsive to reform-minded academics, the alternatives being made were not with influential detractors. Earlier in the dissertation I have mentioned that “compared to other communist rulers, whose speeches and politics are full of empty rhetoric, Nazarbayev's ideas have resulted in bold reforms” (Osipian, 2018, para. 2).

the State does everything to create new opportunities for you. Today you have opportunities your parents wouldn't even have dreamed about.

Remember: your personal success is the success of your parents, the success of your relatives, the success of your families, the success of all your fellow citizens and most of all the success of our Homeland. (Nazarbayev 2000, para27).

Nazarbayev discussed in his official speeches that totalitarian and autocratic ruling of the Soviet government resulted in disastrous economic and social hardships for the people of Kazakhstan. In the book, Nazarbayev described the years of being a part of the USSR as follows, “Kazakhstan was a member of the Soviet Union for almost 70 years and a participant of a global socio-economic experiment called the Building of Communism. For Kazakhs, the experiment nearly ended with national disaster. Without exaggeration, our people experienced unprecedented destitution and hardship in the 20 century – forced emigration, hunger, repression, and wars” (Nazarbayev, 2010, p.19).

Therefore, Nazarbayev’s entire neoliberal agenda targets young people, from schoolchildren to university students.

in this we must seek support in the younger generation which is more flexible in adapting to the new system of values and has a fresh vision of the future. In fact, the state is unable to reverse established human mentality overnight. However, the state can accelerate the process of changes through elucidation of objective trends, through bringing home essential information and-most importantly-by way of implementing social and economic policy aimed at self-sufficiency. It would take decades until a new world outlook comes into existence with us (Nazarbayev speech, 1997, para.9).

Nazarbayev urged to enlist the help of the younger generation, which is more adaptable to the current system of values and has a fresh perspective on the future. The state would not be able to transform human mindset overnight. The state, on the other hand, will hasten the process of transition by elucidating objective patterns, taking vital knowledge home, and, most importantly, by encouraging citizens to participate in the process.

as I shall always keep repeating – your young people of today – are a special generation. You have been born and are growing up in independent Kazakhstan. Your young days coincide with a time of growth and prosperity for our country. And you have absorbed this spirit of achievement and determination to succeed. Our country's destiny will be determined by what you make your own.
(Nazarbayev, 2010, p.9).

Policies that Have no Names

My third research question is about how neoliberalism has been conceptualized in official and public documents. First, in all public and official documents and presidential speeches, which were under scrutiny, the word neoliberalism has never been mentioned (See screenshot below). In Kazakhstan, without using the word neoliberalism, its tenets are promoted as a way for Kazakhstan to prosper as a country by transitioning from a resource-based economy to a knowledge-based economy. Yet, the core principles of neoliberalism, such as privatization, competition, self-reliance, individualism, and diversification have been frequently used in Kazakhstan's public and official education policy documents (see Table 12) Thus, although Brown (2013) suggested that neoliberalism is peculiar to the northern hemisphere, as current research and other similar research results have revealed, the Central Asian post-communist states, Kazakhstan, have been far from immune.

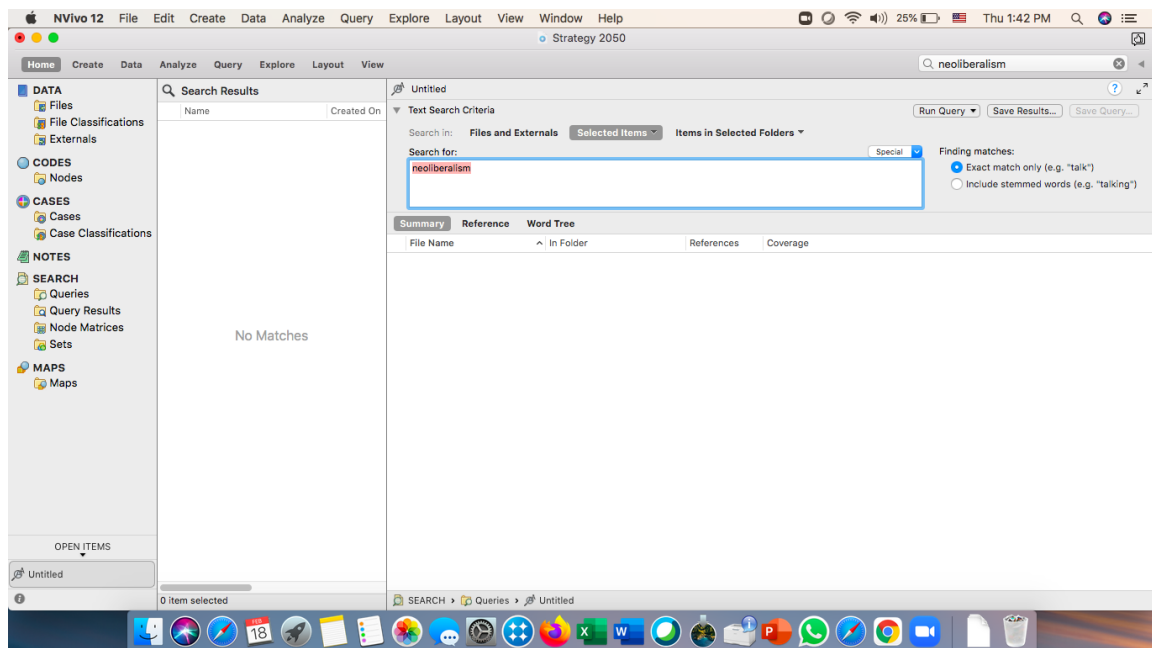


Table 12

Core Neoliberal Principles in Data

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
development	11	551	1.11%	develop, developed, developing, development, developments, develops
national	8	299	0.60%	nation, national, nationalism, nationalities, nationality, nations, nations'
economic	8	272	0.55%	economic, economical, economically, economics
new	3	255	0.52%	new
economy	7	225	0.45%	economies, economy
educators	9	223	0.45%	educate, educated, educating, education, educational, educators
international	13	178	0.36%	internal, international, internationally
market	6	177	0.36%	market, marketing, markets, markets'
society	7	175	0.35%	societies, society
modernize	9	125	0.25%	modern, modernization, modernize,

				modernized, modernizing
reforms	7	123	0.25%	reform, reforming, reforms
effectiveness	13	116	0.23%	effect, effective, effectively, effectiveness, effects
strategic	9	114	0.23%	strategic, strategically
privatization	13	110	0.22%	private, privately, privations, privatization, privatized
investments	11	108	0.22%	invest, invested, investing, investment, investments
foreign	7	105	0.21%	foreign, foreigners
competitiveness	15	95	0.19%	competition, competitive, competitiveness
capitalization	14	86	0.17%	capital, capitalism, capitalization, capitalize, capitalized, capitals
democratic	10	68	0.14%	democratic, democratically, democratization, democratize, democrats
freedom	7	47	0.10%	freedom, freedoms
democracy	9	41	0.08%	democracies, democracy
accountability	14	39	0.08%	account, accountability, accountable, accounting

transparent	11	36	0.07%	transparence, transparency, transparent
equal	5	31	0.06%	equal, equality, equalized, equally, equals
liberal	7	31	0.06%	liberal, liberalism, liberalization, liberalize, liberalizing
individual	10	30	0.06%	individual, individualism, individuals
innovation	10	29	0.06%	innovation, innovations, innovative
patriotism	10	29	0.06%	patriotic, patriotically, patriotism, patriots
tolerance	9	18	0.04%	tolerable, tolerance, tolerant, tolerated
decentralization	16	15	0.03%	decentralization, decentralizing
diversification	15	12	0.02%	diversification

Nazarbayev remained a dominant figure in the diffusion of neoliberal's core principles in independent Kazakhstan. However, like in other data sources, Nazarbayev maintained the mysterious nature of current transformational policies. Nazarbayev's every address to the nation was full of neoliberal rhetoric, but he never used it in his speeches. This narrative goes along with a broad neoliberal perception in the world. As I started to comprehend the significant pillars of a neoliberal ideology, I noticed it everywhere, particularly in Nazarbayev's rhetoric. As an elected president, Nazarbayev tried to explain the market economy to the public and succeed in it.

Neoliberalism Liberally Adapted

Steiner-Khamsi, Silova, and Johnson (2014) regarded Kazakhstan as a "late adaptor" of neoliberal education policy instruments. The reason for adopting neoliberal educational policies later, compared to other Western and Asian states, lies in pre-independent Kazakhstan's ideological and government structure. Like other post-communist countries, Kazakhstan adopted neoliberalism in the 90s. In this regard, the analysis of the official and public documents has revealed that neoliberalism was adapted in a primarily liberal and democratic way due to the USSR's economic and political collapse. The adoption of neoliberal's core principles was almost inevitable after the crisis associated with the lack of financing, jobs, cadres, etc.

To be specific, throughout presidential speeches and educational policy documents, reforms such as decentralization, privatization of public universities, the autonomous status of national universities, and university leadership appointments based on the American model remain to be influenced by the neoliberal ideology. It is also remarkable that none of the current education policies, so strongly and vocally supported by the Kazakhstani leadership, have never been appropriately interpreted to the public. As I was working with data, I realized that education policymakers have failed to construe educational policies adapted from western states.

As a result, to avoid any contradiction or opposition from the public, policymakers in Kazakhstan used the language of persuasion by manifesting neoliberalism on the positive side and as a concept that would bring prosperity on the state and individual levels.

Unfair Competition and Unclear Entrepreneurship

Under neoliberalism, Kazakhstani society has been allegedly called to reconceptualize its identity to peculiarly fit into market realities. Through the policy documents and official speeches, the policymakers in Kazakhstan stimulated and exhorted the public to be

conceptualized as less socially connected citizens of a commonwealth and morally situated members of society self-concerned competitors, egotistical entrepreneurs, and rational consumers. For the effective transformation of thoughts, beliefs, lifestyles, norms of behavior, etc., the policymakers extensively used higher education institutions for the young generation's outreach. In this essence, universities are venues for forming and producing future workers, who would compete for survival within the market system, "higher education plays an important role in the training of competent and competitive professionals for all sectors of the economy in the integration of science and industry" (Kazakhstan state program of education development of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2011-2020).

Brutal competition is an integral component of the higher education system in Kazakhstan. Universities compete to receive additional state subsidies. They equally compete to recruit the most promising and outstanding students with merit-based government financial aid, "public HEIs have to compete with the private HEIs in the market for students, and consequently" (OECD report, 2007, p. 127). Students, in turn, contend against one another to obtain state merit-oriented scholarships to enter those schools, which get extra government subsidies.

More funding from the governing body means more prestigious, resourceful, and technologically equipped the schools are. Competition for students with government money and the additional state subsidies are crucial for universities, as "students can obtain a state grant based on their score on the Unified National Test (UNT) or the Complex Test (CT) and on their willingness to pursue a degree in a field to which a specified number of state grants is allocated. The use of competition for the allocation of resources is a common feature of budgeting in Kazakhstan" (OECD report, 2017, p. 245).

Unfair Advantage of a Public Sector

The private sector has been established so that it could maintain competitiveness among private and public schools. However, the competition between state and private sectors initially is predetermined. The state sector obtains extensive extra fiscal support as more students with government merit-based scholarships attend public schools.

free higher education is available on a competitive basis only when the individual is participating for the first time at a particular level. Public educational grants give selected students access to the institution of their choice, and the major share of grants are allocated to state educational institutions." (OECD report, 2017).

Competition is unfair even though the country's leadership has been significantly promoting privatization. In one of the speeches, Nazarbayev mentioned, "Private businesses are normally more effective than state-run enterprises" (Nazarbayev, Strategy 2050). In another public document, it was stated, "private HEIs are allowed and encouraged to operate, generally on equal terms with the public HEIs, though must finance their land and buildings, unlike the latter, which are eligible for grants from the ministry" (OECD report, 2007, p. 128).

Nevertheless, despite stating that the private sector is more effective in the market-driven economy than the state ones, with no government support, private universities struggle and lose to a state sector, "private institutions sometimes argue that government subsidies to public institutions give the latter an unfair advantage since they permit lower student fees" (OECD report, 2017). The elements of unfair competition are related to students with merit-based funding. Students with scholarships tend to be the beneficiaries of competitive government scholarships, and they tend to choose public universities over private ones. In this regard, "it is understandable that private institutions might seek public support, arguing that public subsidies

should be available on an equal basis for students attending any institution" (OECD report, 2017). Private universities lose students with state funds and the significantly highly competitive and intellectually promising student body, potentially benefiting the research. "The bulk of government funding for research goes to the public universities and research institutes (93%). A small number of recently privatized universities also receive some research resources, but overall State support for research conducted by private universities and institutes is insignificant" (OECD report, 2007, p.86)

Universities Compete for Little Money. In 2013's presidential address, Nazarbayev stated that "education reform is one of the most important instruments that ensure Kazakhstan's real competitiveness." The country's leadership encourages competition and is willing to allocate public funding to leading universities. The central idea is if you want to succeed, you need to have opponents, and you must bite them. The question is, what are they competing for?

According to the OECD report 2017, public spending in the educational area is substantially lower than in many peer countries. "Kazakhstan's public spending for education stood at 3.6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014, with spending for higher education representing about one-tenth of this, or 0.3% of GDP. In absolute terms, public higher education spending stood at about KZT 133 billion, or roughly USD 400 million at mid-2016 exchange rates. These levels of investment as a percentage of GDP are substantially lower than in many peer countries and far below the average investment in OECD countries" (p. 242). In the same report, the evaluators concluded that "higher education is poorly funded in Kazakhstan" omitted (OECD report, 2017, p. 255)

There is also an inclination to solely uphold academically able students—policymakers in Kazakhstan desire to select the most intellectually capable candidates and provide them with

state grants. There is also a preference towards specific universities, which attract the most state appropriations. The problem with that is that financially supported universities tend to be also attractive to the recipients of highly competitive state scholarships. Namely, Nazarbayev University, which is fully financially maintained by the government of Kazakhstan. Policymakers ignore other factors.

the nation's financial strategy for higher education has been focused on two overriding objectives – internationalization and financial support for the most academically able students. These objectives are central to broad national goals for higher education, but they concentrate resources at the system's top. It is unlikely that these kinds of targeted investments will by themselves yield the results needed for the nation. Additional priorities warrant attention and greater financial support. (OECD report, 2017, p.243).

As noted, universities in Kazakhstan, public and private, compete aggressively to obtain incredibly scarce resources compared to other developed and developing countries. The problem is institutions of higher education in Kazakhstan must achieve international prestige and competitiveness by producing and disseminating research at the significantly underfunded universities.

More funding from the governing body means more prestigious, resourceful, and technologically equipped the schools are. Competition for students with government money and the additional state subsidies are crucial for universities, as "students can obtain a state grant based on their score on the Unified National Test (UNT) or the Complex Test (CT) and on their willingness to pursue a degree in a field to which a specified number of state grants is allocated. The use of competition for the allocation of resources is a common feature of budgeting in Kazakhstan" (OECD report, 2017, p. 245).

Authoritarian Neoliberalism

Table 12

Nazarbayev's President Term

timeframe	event
<i>April 24th, 1990</i>	<i>Nazarbayev first elected president of Kazakh SSR</i>
<i>December 1st, 1991</i>	<i>Nazarbayev re-elected president of Kazakh SSR</i>
<i>April 25th, 1995</i>	<i>National Referendum – Nazarbayev's presidential term extended until 2000.</i>
<i>August 30th, 1995</i>	<i>New Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan was approved by the national referendum. Later, this constitution will be the subject of amendments.</i>
<i>January 10th, 1999</i>	<i>Early presidential elections</i>
<i>June 27th, 2000</i>	<i>The country's parliament adopts a law on the first president of Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev received guarantees that gave him broad powers. In less than a month, the president himself signed the law.</i>

<i>December 4th, 2005</i>	<i>Third presidential elections in Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev received more than 91% of the votes. He was elected for a seven-year term.</i>
<i>May, 2007</i>	<i>Parliament adopts amendments to the Constitution limiting the powers of the president to two terms. But this amendment could be applied to the first president of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev. He got the right to lead the country for life.</i>
<i>June 15th, 2010</i>	<i>Nazarbayev was awarded a title of the leader of the nation</i>
<i>April 3rd, 2011</i>	<i>Second early presidential elections</i>
<i>April 26th, 2015</i>	<i>Third early presidential elections</i>
<i>March 19th, 2019</i>	<i>Resignation</i>

As opposed to the Western capitalist states, neoliberal policies in Kazakhstan have encountered a significant cultural and ethnic barrier to transform into a truly liberal state after becoming independent. In particular, the results of my research analysis of the president's speeches and books suggest that Kazakhstan represents a leader-centric and authoritarian state that strives to integrate into global international markets keeping its unique model of the

neoliberal state. During the initial pilot study that I conducted for my dissertation proposal defense; I found a theme/code that was quite common throughout my first data analysis. I decided to follow with this finding to indicate if “leader-centrism” is present in other sources of data. I applied an inductive approach to data analysis and constant comparison methods to develop the current theme and to indicate its relation to the higher education system.

Before discussing the idea of leader-centralism in modern Kazakhstan, I am deeply convinced that it is pivotal to consider the historical roots and cultural uniqueness of a central Asian country like Kazakhstan. In the last chapter of the dissertation, I will expand on the idea of historical roots of the political leadership in Kazakhstan. Nonetheless, for the readers not familiar with Kazakhstan, I am eager to provide a brief description of leadership provisions long before Kazakhstan integrated into a market system.

Kazakhstan is a Muslim majority (approximal 70%) male-dominated state in Central Asia. Kazakh people maintained a nomadic lifestyle before joining the USSR in the 1930-s. One result of the historical advancement of the nomadic people groups of Inner Eurasia is that Kazakhstan’s contemporary political culture is described by traditionalism, conservatism, and an inclination for a strongman head whose essential obligation is to protect public security. Kazakhstan is a customary society where deference to central power characterizes political culture.

Representing an essential part of the communistic, authoritarian, and centralized system of the USSR in the past, modern Kazakhstan could not prevent the inheritance of the institutional legacy of the Soviet leadership model. The communistic administrative arrangement has been reflected in the modern governmental system of Kazakhstan in the way of a leader-centric presidential government with an exclusive leading political party, “Nur Otan,” which by law is

chaired by Nazarbayev. As Sholk (2015) indicated, “Nur Otan’s dominant position in Kazakhstan politics reinforces the notion of the indivisibility between the party and the state. In this respect, too many Kazakhstanis, Nur Otan can be viewed as a contemporary iteration of the Communist Party” (para. 12).

The leader-centric or leader-initiated system of governance has impacted each structure of the policy reforms initiated since the 1990s, including the reforms in higher education. Hereby, the free market-driven modern higher education system in Kazakhstan has been significantly influenced by the ideas and vision of the president. Nazarbayev initiated a project that is targeted at transforming higher education institutions in Kazakhstan to follow the Western model of education. After examining policy documents and strategic plans, I argue that policy changes and reforms were clearly influenced by Nazarbayev’s political and economic agenda, as Nazarbayev stated in one of his speeches that “the common goal of education reforms in Kazakhstan is to adapt the education system to the new socio-economic environment” (Nazarbayev speech, 2011).

Nazarbayev’s vision and his political and economic agendas are reflected in the state education development programs, education laws, and strategic plans of Kazakhstan’s major national universities. Primarily, in the State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020, it was indicated that the program’s major goal was to fulfill the ex-president’s agenda for competitiveness and economic development. “The President of Kazakhstan has also set a task on the accession of our republic to the club of 50 most competitive countries in the world. Improvement of the education system plays an important role in achieving this goal” (the State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020, para. 24).

Key educational projects such as international scholarship for talented students to study abroad fully covered by the government's expenditures, a network of specialized schools for gifted children focused on trilingual education, a world-class education structure with the partnership of British, American, and Singaporean leading institutions of higher education were all initiated by the ex-president of the Republic of Kazakhstan. "I have created a world-class University, intellectual school and established the Bolashak programme" (Nazarbayev – Strategy Development-2050, 2010, para. 112).

These projects have been financially supported and prioritized by the government. These projects were created to allow talented students from all social classes to experience quality education based on English instruction. As Nazarbayev described, in his 2012's presidential speech, "Nazarbayev University is also extraordinarily well resourced compared to other universities in the country, with high-quality infrastructure and facilities." However, this argument is very problematic as children from less privileged families have restricted access to extracurricular classes that can help them prepare for access to prestigious colleges. As a result, "gifted" schools are more likely to attract a segment of students – those from more affluent backgrounds – instead of the most academically capable students in the country.

schools that cater to gifted students, such as the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, receive considerably higher levels of funding than mainstream schools. However, the very notion of "giftedness" that underlies these schools is somewhat problematic in the Kazakhstani context. Students from less advantaged backgrounds have limited access to extracurricular classes to prepare for admission to elite schools. This makes it likely that "gifted" schools do not necessarily attract the most academically able in the country, but rather tend to disproportionately meet the needs of a subset – those from more advantaged backgrounds. (Nazarbayev 2012).

In Nazarbayev's speech 2006, it was stated, "We will help our best and brightest to go and study abroad. Every year, within the framework of the "Bolashak" (The Future) program,

3,000 of our best students will receive scholarships from the national budget to study at the leading universities of the world”.

Expensive but not Effective

Officially, there is still no accessible to the public evidence of Nazarbayev University's effectiveness: some of the funded research projects have yet to announce their results, and the OECD review team's interactions with staff from other institutions revealed a lack of knowledge of the university's programs, accomplishments, and any lessons learned,

there is currently little publicly available documentation of the performance of Nazarbayev University: some of the supported research projects are yet to report their findings, and the OECD review team's discussions with staff of other institutions identified a lack of awareness of the university's initiatives, its achievements and any lessons learned. (OECD report, 2017, p. 156).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The disbanding of the Soviet Union (1922-1991) led to significant economic, cultural, geographical, political, and behavioral transformations in all newly established former Soviet states in 1991. After communist's most powerful engine and “the world's most economically advanced non-OECD states” ceased to exist, Kazakhstan had chosen to pursue the market system instead of a centrally planned economy, privatization instead of state ownership, decentralization instead of centralization, individualism instead of collectivism, democracy and freedom instead of totalitarianism and dictatorship (Allen, 2001, p. 861).

The current research has allowed me to trace significant changes in higher education and the economy, politics, and the local population's culture after Kazakhstan gained independence. By critically analyzing official public records, educational laws, strategic plans, presidential speeches, and social media posts, I concluded that the Kazakhstani higher education system had adapted fundamental neoliberal principles by slowly and surely introducing and constituting the body of laws and planning exercises to meet the new market realities.

Kazakhstani policymakers installed neoliberal policies, practices, and principles deliberately and thoroughly. While Nazarbayev has remained the primary actor in Kazakhstan's political arena to implement comprehensive neoliberal reforms in higher education, neoliberalism has attained socioeconomic sustainability and political invincibility. Neoliberalism has represented a fundamental component of his political regime and his critical decisions. Kazakhstan's first president has played a significant role in shaping and sustaining neoliberal core principles in all spheres of Kazakhstani social life.

Follow the Money

American society has built, in large part, around the concepts of individual freedom and independence. The Free Dictionary explains the term "individual freedom" as a "belief in the individual's primary importance and the virtues of self-reliance and personal independence." Like this definition, Harvey (2005) pointed out that the concepts of dignity and personal choice were always appealing instead of imposed values and collective behavior. Policy makers in Kazakhstan, specifically the former president of the country, Nazarbayev, were empowered with these ideas to start dissident movements for the sake of personal freedom. The movement intended to transition from an outdated Soviet economic system to an economy build on neoliberal core principles, including extreme individualism and personal choice. The critical analysis of my dissertation strongly supports this forcible argument as Nazarbayev has remained an unrestrained vocal supporter of neoliberalism. Not only vocally, but his confident actions towards Western democratic ideas have eventually placed Kazakhstan on the neoliberal path.

The concepts of personal freedom and individualism are very appealing. But they can also bring challenges. Specifically, the concepts of individual freedom and American foreign economic policies have created tremendous and horrible damage to Iraq. Harvey (2005) mentioned that before the American invasion, "the Iraqis were free, and that was all that mattered" (p. 6). The US, Bush administration tried to impose their orders to take the Iraqi government under control by justifying the spread of freedom in this state. For many, these orders seemed to be a violation of The Geneva Convention. Harvey (2005) noted that the London Economist ironically called this regime "a capitalist dream." The regime that idealizes democracy and equality for all.

Along with Iraq, Chile has also suffered from imposed freedom and American policy (Harvey, 2005). Nevertheless, civilian casualties from the armed conflict were more minor in Chile than in Iraq. The hands of domestic business elites conducted another "capitalist dream" in Chile, similar to Iraq. A military coup took place in Chile against the democratically elected government (Harvey, 2005). The University of Chicago educated Chilean economists tried to restructure the economy according to neoliberal theory. They opened natural resources to private and unregulated exploitation, facilitated foreign investment and freer trade. However, all these radical economic changes in Chile eventually resulted in economic collapse and a debt crisis.

These brutal neoliberal experiments in peripheries, the counties outside of the global core, cost the lives, jobs, security of the ordinary people (the working class and the poor). Due to the lack of revenue from taxpayers, most of the states were no longer able to support socially valuable industries, such as education, health care, and the market. Some Central European countries with "colony" mentalities have constant struggles to adjust to neoliberal ideas and concepts.

Unlike Iraq and Chile, neoliberal policies transmitted to Kazakhstan in the forms of loans from international financial institutions. The World Bank and Asian Development Bank assisted a newly established state financially to reform education. The financial assistance was delivered with conditions that sustained neoliberal core principles. The acceptance of neoliberal policies was equally advantageous for both sides, for Kazakhstan and Western financial organizations. Kazakhstan seeks to decrease the financial dependence of Kazakhstani universities to prepare more students for jobs by allowing government and non-government-owned universities. More employed professionals mean more potential customers with financial capital to consume Western products. For financial organizations, the acceptance of neoliberalism's prescribed

package by Kazakhstan meant extensive political and economic influence. Slowly but surely, by influencing educational policies and suggesting novice reforms inspired by core neoliberal principles, people in Kazakhstan have acclimatized to an unfamiliar economic, political, and social situation.

Give a Little. Get a Lot!

Even though Kazakhstan has adopted most core neoliberal ideas in all spheres of the country's life, I have found that neoliberal higher education was historically and geographically specific. Historically, Kazakhstan adopted a neoliberal education policy package recommended by the World Bank after the USSR's political and economic collapse. Historical unavoidable factors transformed community-oriented and government-dependent Kazakhstan to rely on Western loans to proceed with the development of the soviet free state. Kazakhstan has turned towards neoliberalism with the financial support of the world's major financial institutions.

Devies and Bansel (2005) claimed that it was complicated to provide a history of neoliberalism as it had emerged at different times in different places about thirty years ago. Most countries have adopted neoliberal educational policies in various ways. Some countries partially transferred to neoliberalism (Sweden), while others adjusted to neoliberalism under global pressure (Chile). In the third group, those countries accepted neoliberal policies deliberately and thoroughly, like Kazakhstan.

Geographically, neoliberal education policies came across the state's cultural and political peculiarities based on collectivism, autocracy, presidential board power, and strict government control. As a result, neoliberalism in Kazakhstan has been mutated to fit locally. Simultaneously, neoliberalism was a perfect fit for Kazakhstan due to the system's meritocratic, competitive, and elitist inclination. There is a strong idea in Kazakhstan, promoted by the former

President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, that through participating in the educational process effectively, despite the socioeconomic status of a student, anyone could obtain state financial support to not only advance education in Kazakhstan but also take advantage of international education.

In this sense, neoliberalism releases the mental force and energy of opportunity, which makes more lively financial development and movement into the worldwide economy. More abundance is made for power elites by releasing the fantasy of already unempowered people's and families' upward portability. The possibility of limitless freedom is inspiring and delivers development. In any case, the opportunity is at last refereed by power elites who look for benefit and protect the frameworks that convey their benefits. At last, neoliberalism is a device of avarice. As iconic neoliberal symbol, Gordon Gekko proclaimed in the Academy Award and Golden Globe Award winning film, *Wall Street* (1987), "Greed is good!" One of the reasons why fiction can be so incredible is that, whenever progressed admirably, fiction can catch and distill expansive real factors in explicit articulations, for example, "Greed is good!" A centrally planned economy, which is a profoundly directed economy, did not seem to convey abundance at a size like neoliberal, unregulated, unrestricted economies. Amusingly, the unregulated economy as an idea (Smith, 2017/1776) was verbalized by Adam Smith (1723-1790), a Scottish Enlightenment moral scholar (Smith, 2005/1759), who considered the market to be a path for ordinary people to flourish notwithstanding inherited nobility and the Church. Obviously, neoliberal, political-financial frameworks cannot support themselves notwithstanding unregulated eagerness (Harvey, 2005). They breakdown and need immense, against neoliberal, Keynesian (1883-1946; Keynes, 1936) administrative mixtures of money (bail outs) as in the United States with the 2008 Bush Great Recession and as of now with the monetary pulverization identified with Trump's

overwhelming bungle of the COVID-19 Pandemic. These facts clearly represent the reality. The analogy between manipulating the environment at the cost of undermining the sustaining environment, such as rejecting climate change science for personal benefit at the expense of the wider world, is convincing. The neoliberal position would favor allowing the market to tackle the issue. Privatization of taking care of these huge issues (a neoliberal fundamental) is for all intents and purposes each area sets out the freedom for benefits without results, simply benefits, which sets out the freedom for additional benefits, until the framework is broken, and a rescue is required. The cycle is clear. Neoliberalism as an instrument of avarice is not maintainable. From multiple points of view, neoliberalism needs regulation to endure itself. Kazakhstan exemplifies the paradox of using the psychological motivation provided by apparent non-regulation to revitalize a population and create a knowledge economy quickly within the framework of an overall structure controlled by a power elite that will dominate and profit the most from the knowledge economy.

Kromydas (2017) contends that by means of globalization higher education frameworks in the developing nations appear to follow Western ways. To forestall disappointment, strategy producers in developing nations will in general imitate just "effective" Western strategies (Nicholson-Crotty and Carley, 2016). Silova (2004; 2009) broke down the replication of Western higher education policy borrowing approaches in the post-communist states and portrayed this cycle as education policy borrowing. Like other post-Soviet nations, Kazakhstan turned into a borrower country. Specifically, in the mid-1990s, Kazakhstan started adjusting and duplicating the American model of private education. The development in the quantity of private higher education organizations is one of the significant attributes neoliberalism as communicated in the Kazakh higher education area. No private higher education area existed in Kazakhstan until

political autonomy as all state funded colleges were supported by the concentrated Soviet government (1936-1991).

Blind Replication of a US Model

To reproduce a productive American higher education model, unmistakably affected by neoliberalism, more than 60 new private colleges rose out of scratch in Kazakhstan after the presentation of the "Law on Higher Education" in 1993. Private colleges were established in each significant city in the wake of getting a permit from the Kazakhstan Ministry of Education and Science. Though the loftiest and exceptionally positioned colleges in the U.S. will in general be private, Kazakhstan's private area does not keep up comparable notoriety and regard. Even though Kazakhstan has completed far reaching privatization changes in the arrangement of advanced education since autonomy, private colleges have a negative standing in the scholarly local area and overall population. Less students enter private organizations in Kazakhstan, albeit the quantity of state-claimed colleges is very nearly multiple times lower than the quantity of private colleges; 52% of Kazakhstan's advanced education enlistment goes to state funded colleges (Bayetova and Robertson, 2019). Moreover, employees at private colleges experience less freedoms to direct great examination because of the deficiency of exceptional labs and libraries. In conclusion, private colleges have been engaged with embarrassments identified with the selling of confirmations and grades to understudies (Bayetova and Robertson, 2019). Large numbers of the private colleges have been shut or suspended inside the most recent 30 years.

A significant cultural modification that took root in Kazakhstan culture was the endorsement of competitiveness and competition to a central value of both individuals and the state. Competition for jobs, education, housing, and other indicators of human well-being became an individual responsibility. The competition was both an outcome of economic

restructuring (e.g., loss of job security, high unemployment) and an ideology that made economic restructuring possible. In the higher education system, a competition was attributed to the transformation of public and private institutions, university admission process, the dissemination of student financial aid, instruction mode at high schools and universities, international partnership and research collaboration, teacher language training, etc. The neoliberal education has also enabled research to be the premier metric of success in the Kazakh academe. Public and private universities obtain state appropriations based on research published in the top-tier scientific journal.

The Nature of a Local Agency

Kazakh historical roots from being independent pastoral nomads to becoming peasants under Slavic peasant colonization is important to mention. The past referral will potentially shed light on wanting to cease Russian influence and seek Western support after independence. The Soviet party ruling brought Kazakhstan the most devastating, tragic, and traumatic events in the Kazakh nation's history. To alter pastoral nomadism and seasonal migration, a way of life practiced by most Kazakhs before establishing the USSR in 1932, Moscow attempted radical reforms. The reforms primarily focused on transforming "a group of Muslims, Turkish-speaking nomads known as "Kazakhs" and particular territory, Soviet Kazakhstan, into a modern, Soviet nation" (Cameron, 2018, p. 3). According to statistics, the radical attempts of forced transition from nomadism to a settled lifestyle resulted in a massive Kazakh famine, which according to statistics, "claimed the lives of 1.5 million people, a quarter of the republic's inhabitants" (Cameron, 2018, p.10).

The Soviet government not only created horrible life conditions to starve Kazakhs to death practically, but it also tried to vanish Kazakh national identity. The word "margurt" and

other close synonyms, such as "shala-Kazakh" (half-Kazakh), appeared since many Kazakhs lost their cultural and linguistic identity under Soviet dominance (Cameron, 2018). The exit of the Soviet system has opened new horizons for Kazakhstan. So, Kazakh authorities turned to the west, to the advanced economies. At the dawn of independence, Kazakhstan had two options, remaining a communistic state, or accepting the realities of a market economy. As the results of the current research have shown, the authorities have chosen the latter.

"No region has embraced neoliberalism as enthusiastically and persistently as post-Communist Europe and Eurasia" (Appel & Orenstain, 2016, p.313). Two social researchers from the United Kingdom initiated a research publication with this sentence. In their study, Appel and Orenstein referred to 15 post-communist countries (Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Belorussia, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia) that considered the establishment of neoliberal policies after the USSR collapsed in 1991. They indicated that political leaders in the former-Soviet states expected political, cultural, ideological, and institutional obstacles to the liberalization and democratization of the post-socialist states then (Appel & Orenstain, 2016). Kazakhstan, like other post-Soviet states, took advantage of a brief "window of opportunity" before normal and stable politics reemerged. Kazakhstan, after independence, was ostensibly "perfect" venue to establish new political, economic, and cultural ideology to eradicate communism. Kazakhstan, like other post-communist republics, was an open space for neoliberal tests. Klein (2006) suggested a similar recipe for the introduction of new market policies, "waiting for a major crisis, then selling off pieces of the state to private players while citizens were still reeling from the shock, then quickly making "reforms" permanent" (p. 7). Neoliberalism is the opposite of communisms, which emphasizes capitalist work ethic based on entrepreneurism and self-

reliance. New ideology demanded a new way of thinking. Higher education institutions roles in Kazakhstan maintained a critical role in forming a new society to meet the novel neoliberal standards.

This dissertation's conceptual foundation has drawn from Silova's groundbreaking research on post-socialist states adjusting to the market system. Silova (2004) discussed three approaches to educational borrowing policies. One of them, and I believe is the most important to comprehend changes that occurred under neoliberal pressure in Kazakhstan. The cultural approach of educational borrowing challenges the common assumption that post-socialist states' policies tend to lead to homogenization. Since local agencies experience international pressure to implement market reforms in higher education, "the culturalist approach places the local agency in the center of education transformation, thus emphasizing "borrowing" as a self-regulated reflection on education reform" (Silova, 2004, p.76). As a result, educational borrowing policies are not imposed within this context but instead applied to meet the specific needs peculiar to the receiver.

Therefore, within the culturalist approach, local agencies are not perceived as victims, brutally manipulated, and controlled by global forces. Conversely, local agencies are equal players that can manipulate and exploit global forcers to meet their own needs.

Silova (2004) argued that "the collapse of empires often leaves a legacy of political, cultural, and educational institutions, as well as cultural norms and behaviors that continue to exist long after their demise, thus influencing post-socialist transformation processes" (p. 76).

The Soviet education legacy has left its mark on the higher education system in Kazakhstan. Even after 30 years of constant reform implementations, Kazakhstani higher education still maintains and desperately attempts to eliminate old Soviet education principles.

My dissertation's current finding contradicts Silova's culturalist approach of educational borrowing, which places the local agencies at the center of attention. Part of the current data analysis shed light on Nazarbayev's role in implementing educational transformations.

Nazarbayev expressed in various public speeches that the Soviet system of higher education should be replaced by the system based upon market principles. Nazarbayev's major goal was to eradicate Soviet communism and to introduce neoliberal policies mixed with educational policies based upon Kazakh national values, traditions, and language.

Neoliberalism in the context of Kazakhstan has mutated to fit locally. Specifically, it was found that neoliberal policies have been promoted via an increased sense of nationalism and patriotism. In Kazakhstan, without utilizing the word neoliberalism, its precepts are advanced nationalistically as a route for Kazakhstan to flourish as a nation by progressing from a resource-based economy to a knowledge-based economy. The country's initiative projected utilizing abundant oil and gas incomes to encourage the progress to a high-level information economy that depends basically on information and ability. Identified with this progress and following a neoliberal worldview, Kazakhstan has formed the objective of improving the nature of its higher instructive framework, with Western principles and works on filling in as essential reference focuses.

The President of Kazakhstan has been Nursultan Nazarbayev from its independence to late (1991-2019) when he ventured down and moved capacity to Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Policy documents investigation shows plainly that one of Nazarbayev's significant objectives was to utilize higher education to cultivate public personality. In this sense, the foundation of a public college with global cooperation was imperative to increase patriotism among the younger age. Nazarbayev University is the leading public college, made in 2010, that endeavors to

consolidate Kazakh public personality with the best worldwide instructive and logical practices. Nazarbayev University is the leading Kazakh college that was made dependent on the standards of self-rule and educational opportunity, albeit on critical examination we can see that cases, for example, these are comparative with the way of life, which for Kazakhstan's situation inclines absolutist. As we can find in our underlying investigation of Nazarbayev's arrangement writings and talks, nations, for example, Kazakhstan with economies dependent on characteristic asset income, may endeavor to make an elective method to create incomes, including carrying out a move from a resource-based economy to an information-based economy. In this occurrence, the Kazakhstani government puts away much cash from oil incomes to the advancement of "a-list college" with an accentuation on patriotism and internationalization (Altbach, 2015). Altbach (2015) illustrated that focal attributes of a-list colleges incorporate extraordinary exploration perceived by peers, top-quality employees, favorable working conditions, educational opportunity and air of scholarly energy, interior self-administration, and adequate financing. As a piece of market-based strategies, Nazarbayev University has been endeavoring to fit the depiction of a top-notch college to acquire acknowledgment on the worldwide scholarly field.

Notwithstanding, Nazarbayev University could be recognized from other comparable ventures as depicted by Altbach (2015) in that the critical mission of it is to make equivalent organizations with American and British colleges. Albeit the language of guidance is English, worldwide employees could become familiar with the public language free of charge while educating and working at Nazarbayev University. The Nazarbayev University organization comprises an equivalent number of local people and outsiders (Nazarbayev University Strategic Development Plan 2013-2020).

File to Liberalize Higher Education

Harvey (2005) noted that "neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political, economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills" (p. 2). Moreover, the author described the role of the state in the neoliberal political economy. The state must serve a guarantee of military defense, security, money integrity, and "zero" regulations and interventions. According to this theory, Harvey (2005) believed that state interventions in markets could lead to biased powerful interest groups' benefits.

The 1960s-70s were a critical period for the dissemination of neoliberal thoughts around the world. It is believed that Ronald Reagan in the US and Margaret Thatcher in the UK were the early advocates and founders of neoliberalism discourse (Harvey, 2005). These two leaders of the most powerful countries "took political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as the central values of civilization (p.5). For centuries, these relatively straightforward and apparent ideals were threatened by dictatorships, fascism, state interventions, collectivism, and communism.

Like his colleagues in the US and UK, Nazarbayev have been an outspoken supporter of neoliberal's core ideas, such as privatization, competition, self-reliance, limited government interference, and individualism. The analysis of Nazarbayev's speeches revealed that Nazarbayev strongly inspired by democracy and freedom. But in practice, specifically, in higher education, the core concepts of democracy, freedom, equality, and equity have been strongly neglected.

Neoliberal policies in Kazakhstan have encountered a major cultural and ethnic barrier to remodel into a liberal state after becoming independent. Specifically, Kazakhstan represents a leader-centric and authoritarian state that strives to integrate into global international markets

keeping its unique model of the neoliberal state. Kazakhstan could be a Muslim majority (approximal 70%) male-dominated state in Central Asia. Kazakh people maintained a nomadic lifestyle before joining the USSR within the 1930-s. One results of the historical advancement of the nomadic people groups of Inner Eurasia is that Kazakhstan's contemporary political culture is described by traditionalism, conservatism, and an inclination for a strongman head whose essential obligation is to safeguard the public security. Kazakhstan could be a customary society where deference to central power characterizes political culture.

Representing a vital a part of the communistic, authoritarian, and centralized system of the USSR within the past, modern Kazakhstan could not prevent the inheritance of the institutional legacy of the Soviet leadership model. The communistic administrative arrangement has been reflected in Kazakhstan's modern governmental system within the way of a leader-centric presidential government with an exclusive leading party, "Nur Otan," which by law is chaired by Nazarbayev.

The leader-centric or leader-initiated governance system has impacted each structure of the policy reforms initiated since the 1990s, including the reforms in instruction. Hereby, the free market-driven modern education system in Kazakhstan has been significantly influenced by the president's ideas and vision. Nazarbayev initiated a project targeted at transforming educational activity institutions in Kazakhstan to follow the Western model of education. Higher education is clearly influenced Nazarbayev's political and economic agenda. Nazarbayev's vision and political and economic agendas are reflected within the state education development programs, education laws, and strategic plans of Kazakhstan's major national universities.

Additionally, key educational projects like international scholarship for talented students to check abroad fully covered by the government's expenditures, a network of specialized

schools for presented children focused on trilingual education, a world-class education structure with the partnership of British, American, and Singaporean leading institutions of upper education were all initiated by the ex-president of the Republic of Kazakhstan. There is currently little publicly available documentation of the performance of Nazarbayev-initiated projects.

The analysis of official documents, presidential speeches, and social media posts has revealed that Kazakhstan's higher education has been undergoing ruthless and endless reforms since the first day of independence. The liquidation of the Soviet education legacy was the primary reason to initiate market-based reforms in Kazakhstan. In contrast to the Soviet's centralized higher education system, decentralization and providing universities more autonomy and freedom were on the agenda at the dawn of independence. One of the findings suggested that decentralization was one of the education policies borrowed from the internationally renowned institutions of higher education. There is currently a global trend of decentralizing education systems. However, I have equally found that Kazakhstan's higher education institutions' decentralization is only partially true. Most states have been experimenting with or considering some form of education decentralization.

The decentralization process transfers decision-making powers from central Ministries of Education to intermediate governments, local governments, communities, and schools. However, the transfer's extent varies from administrative decentralization to a much broader transfer of governance and financial control to the regional or local level. Kazakhstan is a state that seeks to implement decentralization policies by transferring the power from a single government body. As evidenced in numerous policy documents, whereas there are solid theoretical justifications for decentralizing education systems, the current process demands solid political commitment and leadership to succeed. Kazakhstan, like other countries, meets this valuable criterion. The path,

depth, and eventually, the outcome of decentralization reforms relies on the motivations for reforms, the initial country and sector conditions, and the interaction of various necessary coalitions within the sector.

Recommendations

Kazakhstan has achieved political and economic consolidation as a newly formed state under Nazarbayev's leadership. The ability of Nazarbayev as a political tactician was crucial in uniting an ethnically diverse population into a single country. Under Nazarbayev's presidency, Kazakhstan's oil wealth was converted into monetary and symbolic capital, allowing for neoliberal reforms, attracting investors to grow the country's natural resources, and establishing Kazakhstan a recognized player in international politics.

As evidenced in the current research, Nazarbayev has been a strong supporter of neoliberal-based changes in Kazakhstan. Neoliberal ideology had had a significant impact on the higher education system in the country. Students in Kazakhstan maintain rights to experience the country's and the world's most prestigious universities with the government financial endorsement. However, there is very scarce information and data available to indicate if the government's most reliable projects benefit individuals with various socio-economic statuses. Nazarbayev-initiated educational projects were created with the intention to help the population to become mobile. Specifically, by participating in the current educational projects, students can enhance their economic stability. There is minimal data available to conclude that these projects remain a social lift, as was suggested in the essential educational documents.

Therefore, after conducting the in-depth analysis of crucial educational documentation and Nazarbayev's official speech, I would recommend using a complex database system on the individual, institutional, and governmental levels. Universities in Kazakhstan should collect data about students' SES. Collected data should be reported to the Ministry of Education and Science. Data should be available for researchers, faculty members, parents, students, and other

stakeholders. Based on the data, qualitative and quantitative researchers can obtain quality research opportunities, ultimately assisting the government in maintaining data-driven decisions.

Kazakhstani government encourages competition, specifically brutal competition between private and public sectors. As I found in the current research, the rationale for establishing private entities was to improve college access for students from various backgrounds. Nevertheless, competition between state-owned and privately-owned universities is predetermined. There are two ways the government maintain private sector: by legitimizing private universities with license and by conducting attestation. Private universities with positive attestation results remain on the market, while others become a subject of closure. As one of the findings suggests, many private universities have been closed due to the government's optimization program. As such, by financially prioritizing the public sector solely, private universities struggle to attract students. Therefore, the private sector remains nominal and has a highly negative reputation among the population.

In this regard, before leveling up with the public sector, private universities must maintain financial stability. Unlike, private universities in the US, Kazakhstani non-state-owned entities remain with extremely limited opportunities to establish university endowment capital. Private universities solely rely on students' tuition. Competition between two sectors should be encouraged, not surpassed. "Healthy competition" should be encouraged between public and private universities. Specifically, paternalism, or unrepresented support of a state sector should be discouraged by classifying universities instead of private and public but good or bad in terms of their performances.

Kazakhstan still practices merit-based aid. Specifically, when it comes to awarding grants, the Ministry of Education and Science only focus on student's academic success without

considering his family's financial status. It is very important to ensure that disadvantaged communities have access to higher education. As a result, socioeconomic factors should be considered when allocating grants in forms of need-based financial assistance. According to foreign experience, the lower the applicant's total annual salary, the more financial support he or she would get.

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