

Makhabbat Kenzhgaliyeva

German Dual System: A Model for Kazakhstan?

Abstract

This paper deals with borrowing the German dual vocational training model in Kazakhstan. The aim of the paper is to identify the key issues and challenges of the transfer process. The analysis is based on the model proposed by Phillips and Ochs (2003, 2004) which outlines four stages of policy borrowing: (1) impulses, (2) decision, (3) implementation, and (4) internalization. Within this theoretical framework, a descriptive and comparative-historic method as well as content analysis are used to point out the development in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: vocational education and training, Kazakhstan, German dual system, policy borrowing

Introduction

For the last twenty-five years, the Kazakh vocational education and training system (VET) has undergone significant change. The dynamic economic development has led to structural changes in the labour market and an increased demand for skilled manpower. These conditions have challenged the education policy in Kazakhstan as well as the economy. The VET – in Kazakhstan, this type of education and training is more commonly known as technical and professional education (TPE) – has become the link between two national strategies of utmost priority: reforming the whole educational system and increasing the competitiveness of the country's economy.

The German dual VET system has historically been associated with economic progress and a prospering society. It is considered a model of success which many countries have used as a template. Kazakhstan, too, has turned to this model to modernise its VET system.

Theoretical framework

The transfer of vocational education and training structures, curricula or best practices (summarised as *education policies*) between Germany and numerous other countries has been taking place for several decades. In the late 1980s, David Phillips and Kimberley Ochs introduced the concept of *policy borrowing*. They describe 'borrowing' as "...the 'conscious adoption in one context of policy observed in another'" (Phillips & Ochs, 2004, p. 774). How do transfer processes take place in Kazakhstan? Can this project succeed? What steps have already been taken and what obstacles still need to be overcome? This paper attempts to answer these questions based on the four-stage model of policy borrowing in education proposed by Phillips and Ochs (2003, 2004) which facilitates the analysis of complex transfer processes. According to the authors, the exploration of other countries' education systems is often triggered by domestic *impulses* elicited by political change, economic

development or an unsatisfactory external evaluation (e.g. PISA tests by OECD or TIMSS by IEA). Within the framework of this model, a *decision* is taken in the second stage as to which elements from the other country's system are to be adopted. In the third stage, the chosen elements are *implemented* in the country's own system. They will either be met with approval or rejection. In the case of approval, *internalization* i.e. integration into the existing structures of the national education system takes place in the fourth stage. In the event of rejection, the decisions taken in the second stage need to be revised.

Socio-economic context

The Republic of Kazakhstan is one of the five former Soviet Central Asian republics. The ninth largest country in the world with a population of about 18 million people encompasses a multitude of languages, cultures and traditions. While earlier observers predicted this diversity to become a source of conflicts, Kazakhstan has achieved the highest political stability in the troubled region. The country is endowed with natural resources, most notably petroleum and natural gas reserves, both of which have great economic potential. Since its independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has been undertaking comprehensive reforms in order to dismantle the command economy and to develop a market economy which is integrated into the world economy. Its positive growth trend started towards the end of the 1990s. Driven mainly by the oil and gas sector, the real GDP grew by an average of nearly 10% per year between 2000 and 2008, making Kazakhstan one of the fastest-growing economies in the world.

Borrowing the German dual vocational training model

Impulses: Economy, labour market and vocational education until 2008

The rapidly expanding economy has generated changes in the composition and size of the labour market. The majority of enterprises have been privatized. Between 1998 and 2001, the privatization rate amounted to 70%. Many of these companies expanded or reduced the range of their products. Small and medium-sized businesses flourished. These changes have significantly increased the demand for a skilled workforce, especially in the main sectors of the economy, notably the oil and gas industry, the manufacturing industry, and the service industry. More complicated technological processes and increased competitiveness, however, have led to continuously increasing requirements concerning skills and competences. A 2008 World Bank labour market survey of 500 firms reported a shortage of skilled labour. 64% of the respondents quoted the insufficient level of education and a lack of skills as two of the principal obstacles for business development (BISAM, 2008). Most of the qualifications offered by the vocational education and training system in Kazakhstan were considered to be neither relevant to the job market, nor future-oriented.

In the first years of independence, most of the state's efforts in Kazakhstan were focussed on basic and higher education while the VET system suffered from a lack of attention and low investment. This has made the system inefficient and lead to a

significant mismatch between the skills imparted at the VET institutions and the needs of the labour market (Kenzhegalieva, 2010).

Decision: Reform strategies since 2008

Since 2008, we can observe a new development in the Kazakh VET. By 2008, the shortage of sufficiently qualified workers, particularly on the medium level, had begun to impede the economic development and the competitiveness on the world market. The government recognised an imperative for action and launched the ‘State Programme for the Development of Technical and Professional Education for the years 2008-2012’. In 2010, a ‘State Programme for the Development of Education for 2011-2020’ (MESRK, 2010), declared by a presidential decree, was launched. The present educational policy in Kazakhstan is based on the latter, which aims to increase the competitiveness of the education system and thereby promote sustainable economic growth. The programme states the following goals for VET:

- the modernisation of the system of technical and vocational education in order to meet the demands of society and to facilitate the industrial-innovative development of the economy as well as
- the integration of the national education system into the global educational space.

Prior to its independence, the Kazakh VET system was subjected to a Soviet-style vocational education engineered to support a command economy. Greinert (1995) distinguishes three models for VET systems: a) the liberal market economy model, b) the state-regulated bureaucratic model, and c) the dual-corporatist model. According to this classification, the Soviet model could be identified as one that is strictly regulated by the state. Over the last years, the primary goal has been the establishment of cooperative forms of vocational education modelled on the German dual system. Like the German model, the new Kazakh system of vocational training aims to provide young people with the skills required to find employment suited to their preferences and to integrate them successfully into society.

Above all, the programme anticipates that a high-quality vocational education and training will create an environment for the successful implementation of the ‘State Programme for Accelerated Industrial-Innovative Development of Kazakhstan’ that was launched to make Kazakhstan one of the world’s most competitive economies.

Implementation

This important goal could best be achieved by changing the contents of vocational education and training. For this purpose, the National Qualification System was designed in 2012. It was meant to include a National Qualifications Framework, Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks, occupational standards (qualification requirements), educational standards and curricula as well as a system of examinations and certifications. The OECD (2014) identified its adoption as a positive result of the reforms in Kazakhstan. It is similar to the European Qualifications Framework, however not all the qualifications have been mapped into this new framework yet. With the support of experts from the World Bank, the German Development Agency (GIZ) and other international institutions, new occupational standards have been developed, first of all in the main economic

sectors like the oil and gas industry or agriculture and engineering. Based on the occupational standards, the educational standards, which are mandatory for each occupation, should be updated. To meet the demands for a modern and practice-oriented workforce, the extension of vocational practice is essential. As the previously limited scope of practical training has been the subject of considerable criticism, the Decree on the Dual Training System from 21 January 2016 will increase the percentage of curriculum time spent on vocational practice to 60%.

The development and the renewal of occupational and educational standards and curricula can, however, only be successful if employers and professional associations are involved. In the Soviet era, the connection between enterprises and training institutions was regulated by the administrative leverage of the command economy. The collapse of the old economic structures has caused a lack of interest in the VET issues by the employers. To improve the links between the world of education and the labour market, the authorities created the National VET Development and Personnel Training Council, a new platform to communicate with representatives of employers and business associations, which is supported by regional and sectoral councils. These mechanisms are required to provide a balance of forces, a system of close cooperation between the state, private businesses, trade unions and educational institutions. It will help to attract investment into vocational education. Despite best practices – predominantly in the oil and gas sector, and in big national companies – this model has not yet spread nationwide. Small and medium-sized enterprises in particular need stimuli to reinstate their position.

The involvement of employers is also needed to increase the attractiveness of vocational training for young people. Driven by prestige-oriented considerations that are encouraged by their families, many young people prefer higher education: “VET was seen as a channel for young people who had not completed compulsory education, who were unsuccessful in general or higher education or who had dropped out” (OECD, 2014, p. 326).

Internalization

Thus far, a number of steps have been taken to permanently establish the cooperative model through legal measures, the foundation of new institutions as well as structural reforms within existing institutions. However, the cooperative training model has not yet become an extensively used, integral part of the Kazakhstan education system. This development needs to be further monitored.

Conclusion

Obviously, the economic strength of a country and its success in international competition are closely related to the level of development of its system of vocational education and training. Furthermore, the vocational education and training system should provide people with the skills needed on the market while at the same time meeting their individual needs.

The Kazakh government recognises the role of the VET system for the economic and social development of the country and has identified the problems the system is facing. In recent years, great efforts have been made to implement the dual vocational training system. A number of challenges still need to be addressed, some of which have been mentioned in this paper.

In comparative education, we can find examples of countries hoping to find a solution for their own problems by implementing individual elements of a model that has worked and proved to be successful for another country already. If we take a closer look at the German example, the success of dual vocational training lies not so much in its organisation and structure. Rather, it is the result of sensible control mechanisms safeguarding responsible interactions of all parties involved who benefit, in different ways, from qualified vocational training: entrepreneurs, employees and the state. It is therefore of crucial importance for Kazakhstan to develop models and mechanisms compatible with its own historically evolved structures so that a level of success can be achieved that is comparable to that of the dual vocational training in Germany.

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Dr. Makhabbat Kenzhegaliyeva, Leipzig University, Germany, kenshegalijewa@uni-leipzig.de