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The problem of inhomogeneous development regions in Kazakhstan: impact on higher education

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***Abstract*— In this work, the negative impact of heterogeneous development of the Republic of Kazakhstan regions on the quality of higher education is analyzed. A set of measures ordered to negative trends overcoming is offered. It is shown that this set of measures can be based on the concept of information logistics and ensuring the elimination of disparities in employment on key areas (in respect to students employment)**

***Keywords*— Highest education, employment, post-transitional crisis, contact center**

I. Introduction

Decline of the quality of higher education in Kazakhstan (as well as in other post-Soviet states) is the subject of extensive debates both in the scientific periodicals and in mass media [1-9].

In significant part of the cited works the problem of negative changes in the higher education quality, was considered taking into account the analysis of the processes taking place in high schools only. However, the processes, which take place in higher school, are not separable from the processes that take place in society as a whole [1,4,9,10]. Particularly, in [9] it is shown that high schools in Kazakhstan are significantly affected by the specifics of the economy of the country, which are completing the transition from a planned to a market economy. This influence of this phenomenon is so strong that in [9] it was proposed to use a special term - the post-transition crisis.

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In Kazakhstan, the influence of post-crisis transition on high schools is particularly can be listed as [1-3,6-8]:

- sharp decline in the prestige of scientists and teachers in higher education
- absence of motivation (for the vast majority of students) to acquire real knowledge (in the presence of motivation for formal certificates of qualification)
- formation of the development of the informal service market, providing certificates of qualification reception, in particular, higher education diplomas (illegal market of different kinds of documentation, corruption schemes of receiving diplomas, etc.)
- existence of numerous opportunities for career (mainly in management area) for persons who do not have an adequate level of education, in particular, due to family and clan relationships, the manifestations of tribalism, etc.

To sum up, it can be argued that in the mass consciousness of Kazakhtan students there are number of stereotypes, which can be summarized as following. The mass consciousness of the student media suggests that "investment to the future" in the form of receiving of actual knowledge is not justified. This factor, as noted in [9], itself is able to provide an adverse effect on the quality of higher education. However, as shown in this paper, the reasons for the negative trend prevailing in the higher school of Kazakhstan, much deeper. Existing features of the post-transition economy amplify the negative trends that are observed in higher education. Present report shows that overcoming of the negative trends of this type is substantially lies in the economic sphere. In addition, this paper offers a number of unexpected but quite simple tools that can be used for this purpose.

II. Post-transition phenomena in the Kazakhstan Higher Education: Crisis feedback loop

Factor of reducing of motivation of Kazakh students to acquire real knowledge in is not the only factor having an impact on the quality of education. It is a situation where the existing economic structure supports this trend. Namely, simple estimates were made on the basis of official statistics [11, 12] show that more than 30% of the economically active population of Almaty (the city with the vast majority of Kazakhstan higher education institutions) are office workers, low-level managers, etc. (so-called "office plankton").

Such activities do not require high qualifications, however, under the circumstances, are paid highly enough.

Thus, the average salary in Almaty is approximately 110 000 Tenge per month ($700) and "office plankton" salary varies from 80 to 150 thousand Tenge per month ($450 - 850). A considerable number of jobs of this type are occupied by students of Almaty universities (the total number of people 240 000 according to official statistics). For comparison, the average salary of the teaching staff (activity, obviously requiring a significantly higher qualification) is 120 Tenge ($750) at the leading universities of Almaty.

Thus, a significant number of "office" jobs with the relatively high salary create a pressure on high school from the existing labor market. Students involved in the "office" positions often see that all activities are not based on deep professional knowledge and they are strengthening the opinion that for a successful career the professional knowledge got at Universities does not play a significant role.

The results of the sample survey conducted among students of the leading universities in Almaty, support this conclusion.

The anonymous survey was conducted in five Almaty universities (the largest city in Kazakhstan, which holds more than 70% of all students in the country). The total number of respondents was 450 persons.

Respondents were offered to answer the questionnaire

Question 1 (distribution of replies is shown in Fig. 1) was designed to compare how students appreciate their own knowledge in comparison with a formal certificate of higher education (diploma).

1. **How do you think is it possible to enter the professional life only with the knowledge that you have gained at the university, but without a diploma**?
   - Yes, it is possible if you know everything in this specialty
   - Yes, very often
   - Yes, sometimes
   - No

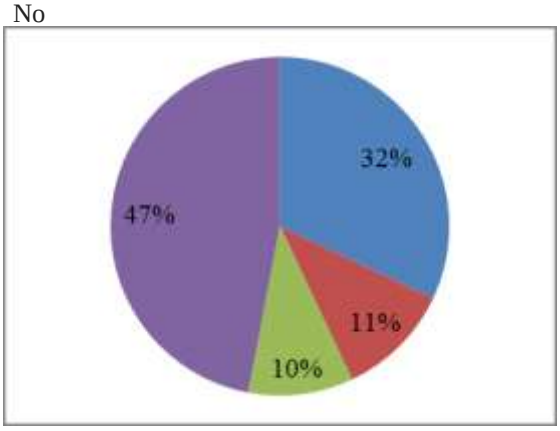

Figure 1. Distribution of answers to question 1

From the distribution of answers to this question can be clearly seen that majority of respondents think that diploma is a necessary attribute of a professional career, which appreciated more as compared with the knowledge.

Question 2 (Figure 2) has a similar goal, but was formulated in a more rigid form:

2. **How do you think is it possible to enter the professional life only with a diploma without the knowledge obtained in the university?**
   - Yes, almost always
   - Yes, very often
   - Yes, sometimes
   - No, it is unlikely
   - No

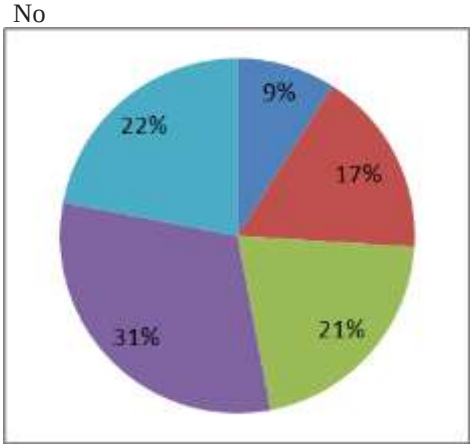

Figure 2. Distribution of answers to question 2

Clearly seen that only 22% of respondents unequivocally believe that knowledge is indispensable condition for a successful professional career, and about a quarter of the respondents believe that a successful career can base only on the certificate of qualification acquisition, not backed by real knowledge.

The next two questions are directly related to the possibility of acquiring diplomas in corruption schemes.

3. **How do you think, is it possible to buy a diploma?**
   - Yes
   - No

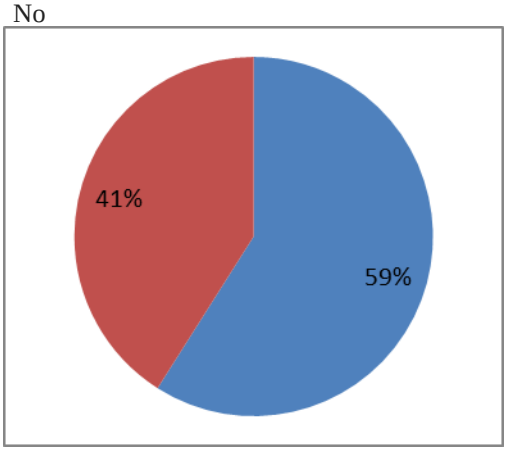

Figure 3. Distribution of answers to question 3

4. **Do you know anyone who received a diploma without the necessary knowledge, just for the money?**
   - Yes
   - No

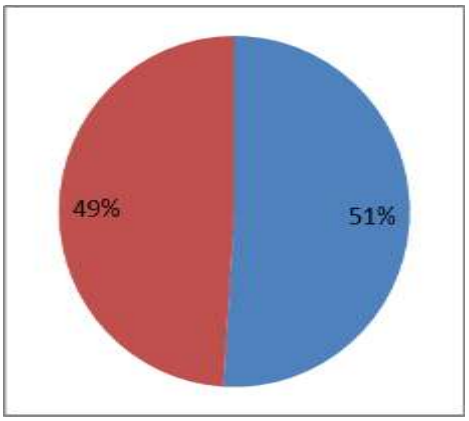

Figure 4. Distribution of answers to question 4

Questions 5 and 6 have much in common with questions 1 and 2; modified formulation allows us to estimate the accuracy of the results.

5. **Do you think that a college education is just a regular formality?**

- Yes, it is just a formality
- Yes, probably
- No, probably
- No

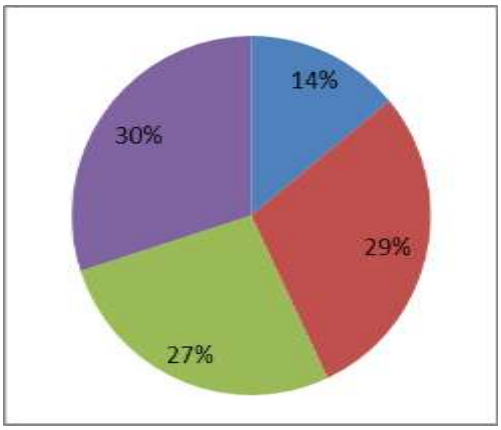

Figure 5. Distribution of answers to question 5

6. **Do you think that attendance at the institute is a waste of time?**

- Yes, I'm sure of it
- Probably yes, than no
- Yes likely
- No likely
- No, it will be useful

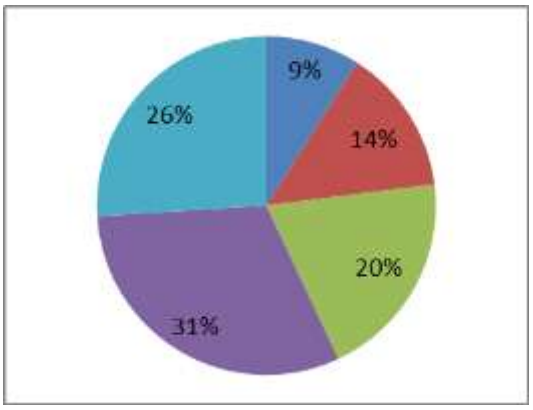

Figure 6. Distribution of answers to question 6

Further promotion of such students on a career ladder closes the loop and gives the negative feedback on the undergraduate and graduate education.

Obviously, the overcoming of such negative trends cannot be achieved by any administrative methods, especially if they are used directly in the form of higher education reforms, "improvement" report forms, etc.

From the perspective of institutional economics, an issue that generates the crisis in Kazakhstan higher education can be stated as following. Personal investment of time and effort in acquiring knowledge are not economically viable for the students in the short and medium term. The reason is the fact that such efforts provide growth of social capital (in the short and medium term), which is comparable with the increment of social capital obtaining in easier way. In particular, the corresponding increase in social capital is provided as necessary skills acquired directly at the workplace.

In the literature devoted to the analysis of problems of post-Soviet high school, this problem is often interpreted through lack of investments to science and education [1-3]. However, there is a reason to believe that this factor does not fully reflect the real situation. As noted in [5-7], the quality of higher education in Russia and Kazakhstan does not increase as much as it would be expected on the basis of data on the overall quality of life in these countries during 2004 - 2014. Also in [9] it was noted that improving the welfare of the population and significant increase in investments in science and education by the Goverment cannot serve as a guarantee to improve the quality of research and higher education. The level of funding [9] in this case is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the expected transformation.

It need to be taken into account that the State's efforts to improve the efficiency of the science and higher education in Kazakhstan are very significant, especially in financial terms, that is was shown in detail in [8]. In the cited report, in particular, noted that "... Kazakhstan for three years is in the top four countries with the highest index of education development (EDI UNESCO). We are far ahead of all other countries in the former Soviet Union."

Consequently, there is reason to believe that the measures aimed to improve the quality of higher education will not be

exhausted by increased investment in science and education. The other possible solutions of the problem are considered in the next section.

III. Ways to overcome the negative trends in the post-Soviet high school

It should be restated that the negative trends in the in Kazakhstan's higher education are mainly determined by the economic pressure from the labor market, in which unskilled "office work" is in demand, due to the peculiarities of the post-transition period.

It is essential that this situation is suitable only for the regions with very high capitalization (the capital city of Almaty and Astana, which are focused in the significant part of the administrative personnel).

The level of income in other regions of Kazakhstan is significantly different from the capitals, Figure 7.

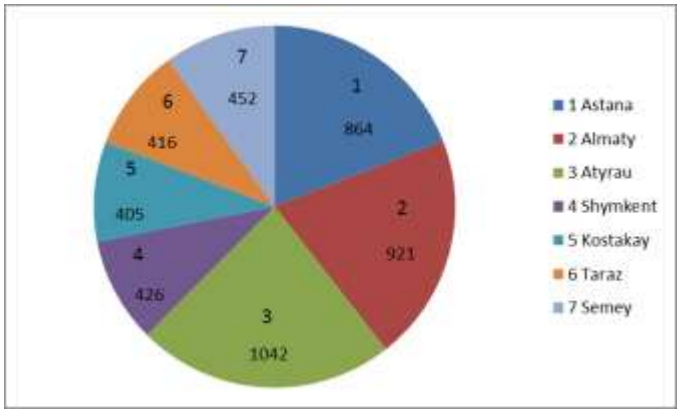

Figure 7. The level of income in the regions of Kazakhstan

Therefore, increasing of the social capital of scientists and teaches cannot be considered as the only instrument of reducing of the pressure on the high school from the abovementioned segment of the labor market; reducing of the social capital of "office plankton" in metropolitan centers should be considered too.

Some steps in this direction could be made in the nearest future. Moreover, they are corresponded for development of natural tendencies. Namely, the development of modern telecommunication systems makes it possible to transfer almost all kinds of office activities, which does not require high skills in regions with low capitalization. Even now, considerable part of companies' contact centers operating in the United States and Europe serve customers in the same country, rendered in India, China, Philippines, Malaysia and Poland The Asia Pacific (excluding Japan) business process outsourcing market forecast to reach $9.5 billion in 2016, up from $5.9 billion in 2011 [13]. According to a detailed study on inbound contact center staffing in 2008 the USA has 47,000 call centers and 2.7 million Customer services Representatives; Europe, Middle East, and Africa together have 45,000 call centers and 2.1 million CSRs; Canada and Latin America have an estimated 305,500 and 730,000 CSRs respectively. India has over one million CSRs and that market continues to grow rapidly [14]. Given the Malaysia contact center outstanding benefits for outstanding benefits for outsourcing, the third in Asian Pacific Region, the industry is expected to worth over US $15.5 million between 2010 and 2014, and her diverse multilingual workforce with an average of 85% employees' with commonly spoken languages such as Mandarin, Hindi, English and Cantonese have greatly assisted in the growth and development of the local call center and to occupy a relevant position in the call center industry [15].

It should be emphasized that the use of such trends are useful for the strategic interests of the Kazakhstan's economy development, as it capable to make a significant contribution to elimination of disparities in regional development.

Certainly, much of the office activities (in particular, relating to the existence of various informal institutions) require personal contact, making it difficult to implement its translation in remote mode. However, now in Kazakhstan a number of measures are developed to ensure the functioning of e-government. If the development of systems which ensure interaction of most organizations with e-government, will maximize formalization (ie provide elimination of the personal contacts influence), a significant portion of office workplaces can actually be taken out to the regions.

Therefore, the methodology lays the basis for the concept of e-government, should take into consideration not only the factor of formalization of citizens and organizations communication with public authorities, but also the factor of formalization of all document management (including documents relating to the exchange of information between private organizations). This conclusion is updated by the research in the field of information logistics and makes it one of the main tools for economic counter negative trends in Kazakhstan's higher education.

IV. Conclusions

Thus, overcoming of negative trends in Kazakhstan's higher education cannot be reduced to the use of administrative tools and "internal" reform, because much of the reasons of their occurrence lies in the economy and is linked to the post-transition phenomena.

The most obvious and implemented in practice tool is to reduce the pressure on the high school from the post-transitional labor market, where there is a significant segment of the jobs associated with the low-skilled employment office.

Considering that the economic reforms in Kazakhstan are significantly ahead of those in other countries of the former Soviet Union, we can predict that in the near future other post-Soviet states will also face post-transition crisis, the same as described above.

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