

## Analysis of dynamics of high school graduates who participated in the unified national test Kazakhstan

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### ABSTRACT

In 2013 it has been executed 10 years since the introduction of the Unified National Test for graduates of secondary schools in Kazakhstan in 2013. The higher education system in Kazakhstan has changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the transition to a market economy economic development. The number of higher education institutions keenly has increased. In 1991 the republic had 55 universities by universities peaked to 182 in 2001.

Conducting Unified National Test for all 10 years since its introduction, accompanied by disputes about its feasibility and objectivity. Opponents of this system have argued that the tests is only a form of learning the curriculum, while the paramount importance should be attached to the quality of education. UNT defenders argue that the testing system - it is a well-established and effective form of graduate's examination worldwide, and Kazakhstan as a part of the international community must comply with the advanced world standards.

Since 2009, a growing number of graduates in the Kazakh language, and a sharp decline in graduates with Russian language of teaching. Thus, in the coming years we should expect an expansion of application areas of the Kazakh language due to the fact that increase the proportion of people who use the Kazakh language as the core. For 10 years, the UNT average score of rural schools graduates is lower than of city schools graduates. For almost 10 years, all of the UNT graduates from schools with Russian language of teaching in the average gain higher scores than graduates in the Kazakh language. On average, graduates of secondary schools in Kazakhstan (except 2010 and 2011) are gaining 50-60% correct answers. That is the average level of education of Kazakhstan graduates do not exceed 60%, which is very low. Thus, the mean value of the share of the average score to total test tasks for 10 years is 57.4%. The most spectacular scandal connected with the UNT is that some prominent public figures associated growth of youth suicide with the unified national testing. So, for the last 10 years in Kazakhstan the number of suicides among young people increased three times. Annually every 12th teenager aged between 15 and 19 years is trying to get away from life. Accessibility of higher education has led to an increase in the percentage of unemployed with higher education diploma: from 14.6% in 2004 to 26.5% in 2012.

### KEYWORDS

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## Introduction

It has been executed exactly 10 years since the introduction of the Unified National Test for graduates of secondary schools in Kazakhstan in 2013. What are the main results of this innovation during this time? Have levels of transparency for higher education of the country increased? Has the level of education in secondary schools increased? We will try to answer in this article on these and other questions.

The higher education system in Kazakhstan has changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the transition to a market economy economic development. The number of higher education institutions keenly has increased. In 1991 the republic had 55 universities by universities peaked to 182 in 2001. Thus the competitive environment has been created in a transition economy, massification of education of young people in higher education reduces the severity of the problems of its employment [1]. The state solved immediate problems at the time: high unemployment, a decline in industrial production, is associated with low-skilled workers and so on. Another reason for the increase in the number of universities was the fact that after independence of Republic of Kazakhstan, the authorities should have to carry out the functions and duties which were administered by the Centre during the USSR period. Therefore it has become an urgent need of opening of new specialties: international relations, state and local government, international law, diplomacy, treasury, accounting and auditing, customs and so on. The rise of higher education institutions in the country was caused by to the requirements of the time. But it was chosen extensive development of this branch of education, quality of education has suffered loss and became lower. Moreover it has now become of reaching cherished "crust" for every citizen of Kazakhstan, it was available for each person in the Soviet Union. That is "forbidden fruit" could taste each, in turn everybody associates a diploma of higher education with a dust-free cabinet work, firstly easier labor unlike physical and secondly the desk-workers have higher social status. As a result, in the institutions of the republic increased number of those who would never have been able to overcome the "exam sieve" in the Soviet school. Consequently the number of students grew in direct proportion who could not pass the exams in the traditional way, and solved the problem of the other easy way. In its turn the employees of the higher education system squeezed into the rigid framework of economic survival, compensation of employees of Ministry of Education was one of the lowest in the country were forced to settle for a "breeding". The higher education has become commercialized which also caused the rapid growth in the number of universities in Kazakhstan: the higher education has become one of the lines of business.

However since 2000, Kazakhstan has become observed economic boom: the GDP growth rate was approximately 10% annually. That the State managed to take the situation under control, improve the work of state bodies, to reduce the number of unemployed, some contain inflation, establish the work agencies on Foreign Relations. It has become a necessity development of the real sector of the economy to the state: industrial production and innovative technologies. However, young people continue to choose specialties where clearly was in surplus: economics, law [2]. It was much less willing to technical specialty. According to a poll conducted in 2004 fifteen thousand students grades 5-11 from rural and urban schools in all regions of Kazakhstan, enrolled in the Kazakh

and Russian languages, following results were obtained. On the question of what kind of education pupils would like to get an education? Answers in descending sequence of Russian-language schools as follows: foreign languages - 23%, the law - 19%, the economy - 16%, other - 12% Medical - 9%, education - 4%. In schools with the Kazakh language in response to a similar question the disciples put first on the economy (22%), followed by jurisprudence (20%), international relations (18%), foreign languages (13%), medicine (12%), and completes the list of pedagogy (2%) [3]. In turn, the choice of a specialty "foreign languages" among schoolchildren with Russian language of instruction is not accidental. So 37% of respondents in this group have expressed desire to go abroad [3].

So it was necessary to correct the situation immediately in the higher education system in the late 1990s and early 2000s. First of all tighten the procedure for admission to universities and reduce human error. Primacy of solving this problem is caused by the fact that the applicants do not meet the requirements for entering higher education, but do not legally enroll in college, could not cope with the high school program, therefore the applicants were issued by unqualified personnel. Thus they could not make any contribution to economic development especially that were issued the proficient mainly lawyers and economists.

In accordance with the instructions of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev about the new principles of admission to higher educational institutions has been developed and approved by Government Decision № 464 of April 24, 1999 "A new model of the formation of public higher education institutions in the Republic of Kazakhstan." This model has allowed to increase the objectivity of knowledge of applicants, to select the most talented youth of enrollments in state order to counter protectionism and exclude many negative phenomena accompanying receiving campaign.

The essence of the new model involves taking entrance exams (integration testing) from all applicants by a single independent body and the tender to each specialty in the whole country. The notified Body for testing students is the National Center for State Education Standards and Testing, Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan, created by decree of the Government of December 3, 1999 № 1850.

The main objective of the transition to the new model is to provide future students the right to choose not only the specialty, but the particular institution where preparation is provided for his chosen profession. The regional commissions allowed to do so without leaving the region of residence.

Statistics show growing confidence of applicants and their parents to the new principles of admission to higher educational institutions: to participate in complex testing in 1999 were filed 43,649 applications (23% of high school graduates), in 2000 - 102 919 (50%), in 2001 - 142 623 (68%), in 2002 - 121 606 (89%) [4].

However this system also had flaws that it was decided to eliminate the introduction of the Unified National Test (UNT) in 2004. The Unified National testing has undergone many changes in 10 years, upgrades during this time it was attended by over 1.33 million high school graduates, respectively the subject of this study actual.

### **Unified National Test (UNT): main results**

According to the Law "About Education" "The unified national testing is one of the forms of the final assessment of students in general secondary education, combined with the entrance exams to educational institutions that provide post-secondary or higher education" [5]. This system involves the combination of final exam and the entrance to universities as well as replacement of traditional exams for testing. Instead, the graduate must pass the test.

The maximum number of points was equal to 120 points on the 4th subjects (3 compulsory, 1 - according to the chosen specialty) during UNT graduate until 2007, since 2007 the highest possible score is 125 points in 5 subjects (4 compulsory, 1 according to the selected skill). In this case compulsory subjects were the language that was studied in graduate school (or Kazakh or Russian), mathematics, history of Kazakhstan to 2007. The compulsory subject for schools with Russian language has become the Kazakh language, and for schools with Kazakh language is Russian language during the 2007-2008 school year. Consequently UNT was held in five subjects: four compulsory, one - profile.

According to the innovations of 2007 each test on the subject consists of 25 questions. Maximum number of points, taken into account during the contest grants is 100 points, as the test results on language which is not the language of instruction. The test results on language are not counted for admission to college, but they are written in certificate about secondary school.

First of all it should be noted that for 10 years the number of graduates of secondary educational institutions in Kazakhstan has decreased by almost 100,000 people. So if this indicator was 235,540 people in 2004, then in 2013, only 138,278.

The reasons are that if in the early 2000s, school-leaving persons born during the baby boom in Kazakhstan early and mid-1980s, then later became high school graduates, those who were born in early years beginning 1990.

So the lowest number of graduates of Kazakhstan during the study period was observed in 2009 - 132,461 people. In Kazakhstan, since the beginning of the 1990s 11-year secondary education has functioned and school enrollment in most cases carried out with 7 years, it is clear that graduates born in 1991 graduated from the school in 2009. Whereas in 2004 the graduates 1986-1987 birth finished school.

In turn the time of the early 1990s is characterized in history as the breakup of the Soviet Union and the formation of independent Kazakhstan. This stage is characterized by the crisis in the economy, industry, agriculture, inflation, falling living standards and other negative trends in economic terms. Consequently it is observed in the social sphere, firstly, reduced fertility, and secondly, the growth of emigration (mostly representatives of Slavic and European ethnic groups), and thirdly, an increase in mortality. Subsequently, the situation has improved in the demographic sphere: reduced rates of emigration, starting the program for the return of Kazakh immigrants forced to leave the country in the period of the Soviet state. Nevertheless the natural decline in population remained very high and this trend continued until the early 2000s. Thus 2.7 million people left in the period from 1991 to 2000 the Republic according to statistics, whereas only 800 thousand came, a negative migration balance consists of 2 million people [6]. On the other hand, the outflow of foreign-born population and the arrival of repatriates (Kazakh repatriates) led to an increase in the proportion of representatives of the Kazakh ethnic group (from 40% in 1989 to 65% in 2013). Thus, the graph shows that the percentage of

graduates with the Kazakh and Russian languages of instruction fluctuate slightly in 2008: 58-59% in the corridor, and 40-41% respectively. But the percentage of graduates with Russian language of instruction since 2009, handing over UNT starts to decrease and reaches a minimum value at 30.16 % in 2013. Whereas the proportion of school leavers in the Kazakh language since 2009 has grown and reached a maximum value of 69.84 % for 2013. In absolute terms, reducing the number of graduates of Russian-language schools that participated in the UNT: from 73 617 people in 2004 to 28,798 in 2013, almost 45 million people (60%). Reduction of graduates in the Kazakh language, who passed UNT also observed, but it was not as significant: from 105 599 people in 2004 to 66,689 in 2013, almost 39 million people (-37%).

As it has been noted above in 10 years took part in UNT over 1.33 million graduates of Kazakh schools. And if in the first years of UNT (2004, 2005) passed the equal amount of about 180 thousand people, in 2012 and in 2013 this figure had fallen to 117 333 and 95 487, respectively. At the same time, it should be noted that the UNT never attended 100% of the graduates of schools of Kazakhstan.

In 2004 76.1% of all school leavers Kazakhstan participated in the UNT, which is understandable, since it was a new system, which is treated with suspicion. And in one year later, when the parents made sure that the system is much more transparent traditional entrance exams, where reigned cronyism, nepotism and telephone right. Therefore, was given a high level of public trust UNT System: 83.2% of high school graduates Kazakhstan participated in the UNT in 2005. And this credit of trust, supported by the population of fatigue corrupt relations with the university entrance lasted a long time: from 2005 to 2009, the proportion of graduates who participated in the UNT ranged between 80% -83%. However, a series of scandals, including corruption, incorrect test questions have led to the fact that public confidence in the credit dried up: UNT in 2010 was attended by just over 75% of graduates.

The next year, the Ministry of Education and Science, other government agencies have tightened requirements for Unified National Test, as a result, 79% local high school graduates came to pass UNT. However, endless upheavals in the education system have led to the fact that since 2011 the share of graduates of Kazakh schools participating in the UNT reduced every year: 2011 - 79% 2012 75% 2013 - 69%. All means distrust of the population as a system of UNT and reluctance to send their children to study in domestic universities because of which the quality of education suffers. On the other hand, the reduction in the proportion of graduates participating in the UNT due to the fact that the majority of pupils after 9 and 11 students prefer to continue their education in secondary specialized educational institutions, due to the reluctance to participate in testing [7].

**Figure 1. The number of graduates who have scored the highest possible score and did not win the minimum passing score at UNT by years**

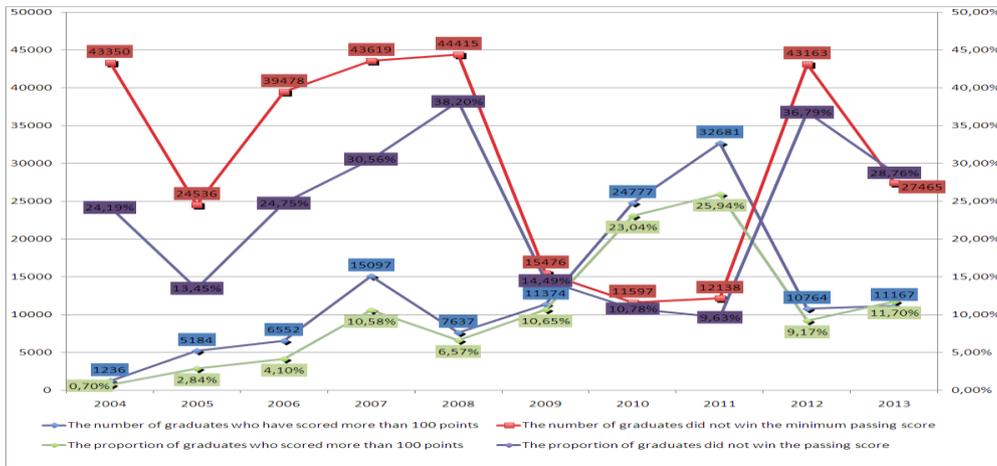


Figure 1 shows that the number of graduates who did not overcome the minimum passing score on average did not change and amounted to 43 thousand - 44 thousand people, only occur following years: 2005 (24.5 thousand), 2009 (about 15, 5 thousand), 2010 (over 11.5 million), 2011 (over 12 million) and 2013 (about 27.5 million). Maximum number of graduates did not overcome the minimum passing score were 38.2% in 2008 and 36.79% in 2012 as a percentage. Whereas the minimum value in the percentage observed in 2011 (9.63%), 2010 (10.78%). It should be noted that according to the Schedule 5, 2010 and 2011 were the most successful graduates. It was in that year, the high rate of graduates were observed, scored more than 100 points 24 777 people (23.04% of the total number of graduates who passed UNT) and 32 681 (25.94%), respectively. The lowest figures for this criterion in absolute values and percentages were recorded in 2004 (0.7%), 2005 (2.84%), 2006 (4.10%).

**Analysis of results of Unified National Test for 10 years (2004-2013)**

In general, Kazakhstan 1333 232 graduates passed UNT for 10 years. Of these, 821,714 people school graduates in the Kazakh language, 511,518 Russian-language schools. For 10 years the number of graduates who have scored more than 100 points is equal to 126,469 people, or 9.5%, while not overcome the passing score - 305 237 people (22.9%). Graduates who defended the title of “Altyn Belgi” are 16 406 people (45.8% of the total number of applicants for this title)»<sup>1</sup>. The average score of all graduates amounted 70.7 points in 10 years. The number of graduates who have scored the highest possible score is 140 people or 0.01% of the total number of graduates who passed the UNT and 0.11% of the number of graduates who have scored more than 100 points. In 2013, the percentage of graduates who scored more than 100 points to 11.7% which is 16 times more than in 2004 (0.7%). It should be noted that this figure has grown from 2004 to 2007 (reaching 10.58%), then there was decrease to 6.57% in 2008 and the subsequent growth up to 2011 (figure was equal to

<sup>1</sup> Altyn Belgi - (kazakh language - Altyn Belgi - "gold badge") badge, awarded honors students in secondary education in Kazakhstan Approved by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan December 21, 2007 N 1253. The graduate should have annual totals rated "5" from 5 th to 11 th grades and confirm the right to receive the mark passing Unified National Test for the course of secondary education on evaluation excellent (20-25 points on the natural-mathematical subjects, 21 -25 points for the Humanities subjects).

25.94%). But in 2012, the proportion of graduates who scored more than 100 points decreased by almost 4-fold compared with the previous year to 9.17%.

The average rating for graduates of rural schools is lower than urban graduates Metal Leg 10 years of the UNT. So, if in 2004 the rural graduates scored an average 48.53 points, 55.64 points is urban. Subsequently, until 2008, this difference was maintained at 4-6 points, while in 2008 the figures reached 9.5 points (72.98 points at graduates of urban schools in rural and 63.43). So this gap had narrowed to 5.6 points, and in 2012 reached a peak of 9.7 points (76.16 in urban and 66.5 in rural). In general, over the 8 years of the UNT (data not available for 2011 and 2013) graduates of city schools on average gained 71.65 points, and rural schools - 64.87. That there is a difference of 6.8 points.

During nearly 10 years of the UNT graduates from schools with Russian language of instruction in the average weight gain higher scores than graduates in the Kazakh language. So in 2004, these figures were equal to 54.7 and 50.6 points, respectively. The next two years this difference remained at 1-2 points, and in 2007 graduates of Kazakh schools showed an average score in 71.42 while graduates of Russian schools just 70.7. However the difference peaked at 9 points (73.38 graduates of schools with Russian language of instruction and 64.39 graduates in the Kazakh language) a year later. In the following years the situation stabilized, and the difference became counted from 1 to 5 points. It was only in 2012 this figure increased back to 8.76 points. Overall The average rating for graduates with Russian language of instruction in 9 years (no data for 2011) amounted to 71.4 points, and alumni in the Kazakh language 67.4. That is a difference of 4 points.

Interesting fact results have shown graduates bordering Russian regions (Pavlodar, North Kazakhstan, West Kazakhstan, East Kazakhstan, Kostanai), as well as Almaty, Astana, above the average GPA. southern regions (Zhambyl, Kyzylorda, South Kazakhstan) and western (Aktobe, Mangistau, Atyrau) below the average gain. Hence the conclusion that the greatest results are achieved in the northern areas and in cities where developed trade and services (Almaty, Astana). Whereas the southern and western regions show the worst results, with these areas show the worst record in all years except 2005, 2010 and 2011.

If is compared 2012 with 2004 the average rating for on the following compulsory subjects "Mathematics", "Kazakh language", "History of Kazakhstan" has not changed: 9 points, 16 points, 13 points, respectively. For compulsory subject "Russian language" observed even decline: from 17.1 points in 2004 to 15.69 points in 2012. Growth is observed only in compulsory subjects "Kazakh language in schools with Russian language of instruction" and "Russian language in schools in the Kazakh language": from 15.98 to 18.06 and 11.19 points to 13.41 points respectively.

## **Figure 2. Average score for the compulsory subjects of the UNT**



It should be noted that the average percentage points to the total number of tests for the 10 observed only a slight increase: 43.58 % in 2004 and 59.6 % in 2013. That is for 10 years as a percentage of the average score of graduates of schools of Kazakhstan grew by about 1.6 %. Nevertheless, it should be noted that in the period from 2004 to 2007 in Kazakhstan UNT consisted of 120 test items (3 compulsory subjects and 1 profile 30 test items), whereas in 2008 such was 125 (compulsory subjects were «Kazakh languages» for graduates with Russian language of instruction and «Russian language» for graduates of the Kazakh language, total 4 compulsory subjects and 1 profile 25 test tasks). It is connected to the fact that the President of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev in 2007 was voiced need gradual implementation of the cultural project "Trilinguism" [8]. This project involves the development of Kazakh society in three languages: Kazakh - official language, Russian as a language of international communication and English language - the language of successful integration into the global economy [8].

If we consider separately two time periods: 2004-2007 and 2008-2013, it is possible to trace the following trend. So in 2004, the average score was 52.3 in the country, in 2005 - 60.4, 2006 - 63.3, 2007 - 71.1. That is seen steady growth. In 2004, the average score among graduates of Kazakh schools was 50.6, in 2005 - 59.8, 2006 - 62.6, 2007 - 71.42. Among the graduates of Russian schools: 2004 - 54.7, 2005 - 61.1, 2006 - 64.1, 2007 - 70.7. It is seen that graduates Kazakh schools gained an average score of about as much as graduates of Russian schools moreover, in 2007 even showed nearly 1 point better result than the last. As for the time interval 2008-2013, we can see that in 2008 the whole country average score of graduates decreased by 3.1 points compared to 2007. And this

despite the fact that the number of tests increased from 120 to 125. As a percentage of the average score to the total number of tests is observed even greater fall: 59.25% in 2007 against 54.4% in 2008. The average score of graduates of the Kazakh schools was 64.39, while graduates of Russian schools have 73.38 in the same year.

Thus lowering the average score of all graduates of Kazakhstan in 2008 affected the results of the Kazakh schools of graduates who gained almost 9 points less than high school graduates with the Russian language of instruction. From this we can conclude that the reduction of the test tasks in compulsory subjects and the introduction of the fourth compulsory subject ("Russian language") negatively affected the average score of high school graduates in the Kazakh language. While these innovations have not led to significant changes in terms of the average score of the graduates of Russian-language schools. For graduates with Russian language of instruction average score was 15.98 in 2008 on the subject of "Kazakh language", while graduates of Kazakh schools scored new compulsory subject «Russian language» only 11.19 points. Thus, it is obvious that high school graduates in the Kazakh language knowledge of the Russian language is much worse than the graduates of Russian schools know the Kazakh language. Due to the fact that most students are Russian schools are representatives of the Kazakh ethnic group, many of which are used in everyday language. While students of Kazakh schools practically do not use Russian language in everyday life. Subsequently, the average score of graduates Kazakh schools "Russian language" was up a bit due to the fact that teachers are preparing graduates for future tests. Finally, on the subject of "Russian language" Kazakh school graduates in the following years began to gain a higher grade point average: in 2009 - 12.02, 2010 - 14.72 in 2011 - 15.18, in 2012 - 13, 41. Showed similar growth graduates of Russian schools on the subject of "Kazakh language": in 2009 - 17.22, in 2010 - 18.4 in 2011 - 18.45, 2012 - 18.06. Graph 10 shows that the average high school graduates Kazakhstan (except 2010 and 2011) are gaining 50-60% correct answers. That is the average level of education of Kazakhstan of graduates does not exceed 60%, which is very low. So that mean value of the share of the average score for the 10 years is 57.4%.

## Conclusion

Conducting Unified National Test for all 10 years since its introduction, accompanied by disputes about its feasibility and objectivity. Opponents of this system have argued that the tests is only a form of learning the curriculum, while the paramount importance should be attached to the quality of education. UNT defenders argue that the testing system - it is a well-established and effective form of graduate's examination worldwide, and Kazakhstan as a part of the international community must comply with the advanced world standards.

For 10 years of the UNT preliminary results can be done.

- 1) Number of graduates of Kazakh schools has decreased over 10 years (2004-2013) per 100 thousand people.
- 2) Since 2009, a growing number of graduates in the Kazakh language, and a sharp decline in graduates with Russian language of teaching. Thus, in the coming years we should expect an expansion of application areas of the Kazakh language due to the fact that increase the proportion of people who use the Kazakh language as the core.

3) For almost 10 years, all of the UNT graduates from schools with Russian language of teaching in the average gain higher scores than graduates in the Kazakh language. Overall average score of graduates with Russian language of teaching in 9 years (no data for 2011) amounted to 71.4 points, and graduates in the Kazakh language 67.4. That is a difference of 4 points. Accessibility of higher education has led to an increase in the percentage of unemployed with higher education diploma: from 14.6% in 2004 to 26.5% in 2012.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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