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## Exploring Educational Leadership Models in Kazakhstan

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**Abstract.** The objectives of the present research are as follows: to determine the leadership styles which are most frequently applied among leaders in Kazakhstan and to provide a literature review containing the data on the contemporary approaches to school leadership. Research on school leadership in Kazakhstan and the approaches employed within is the primary emphasis. Leadership education in Kazakhstan is one of the most promising new areas in the country's educational landscape. While the study acknowledges that the Kazakhstani school leadership approach defies the exact style, it suggests that it may be characterised as transformative. Readers will be able to better understand the topic's current level of knowledge and identify where more study is needed due to this review of recent studies. Regarding educational leadership in Kazakhstan, there seems to be a considerable information vacuum. School directors in Kazakhstan employ a variety of leadership styles, and this research uses a systematic literature review to examine the style of leadership. Our research set out to identify typical leadership styles and analyse their connections to regional and international educational goals and benchmarks. This method seeks to fill the information vacuum and aid in the creation of a stronger and more applicable framework for school leadership in Kazakhstan.



**Key words:** educational leadership, school directors, leaders, professional development, secondary education



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### Introduction

Leadership is now being addressed in a wide range of fields, extending beyond sports, business, or politics. There has been a growing fascination with leaders in education, a relatively new area of research.

During the past two decades many changes took place in the educational leadership in Kazakhstan: these changes are the result both of the recent educational reforms in the country and of the increasing influence of the world educational practices. As Kazakhstan becomes even more integrated on

the global educational learning community, the leaders of schools are now facing broad responsibilities and elevated standards. This necessitates a deep understanding of both traditional and contemporary leadership styles [1].

In view of this, a literature review of the current status of school leaders and their leadership practise in Kazakhstan has been undertaken. It will explore their current view, responsibilities and experiences in relation to their practice in the contemporary learning environment. This article discusses an overview of the research on School governing/budgeting /management systems &

New school development activities in Kazakhstan, based on the analysis of scientific publications of Western countries and Kazakhstan.

The importance of effective school leadership is well documented in the literature pointing to its ontology as a capacity to increase school performance, to elevate teachers' productivity, and thus to increase students' achievements. In Kazakhstan, and likewise in a number of other states, the targets in educational reforms have been an increase in the effectiveness of education and the formation of competition on a world level. We have therefore seen that policies as well as educationalists have shown considerable interest in the effect of school leadership on these goals. It is only proper to provide this review to give a detail account of the existing literature on educational leadership in the Republic of Kazakhstan. It raises awareness of the main currents, threats, and prospects which influence the efficiency of school managers.

In light of the peculiarities of socio-cultural and political development of Kazakhstan, this review also discusses the application of foreign leadership models in schools. It is therefore evident that school leaders are in one way or the other in a quandary concerning the best way to embrace their leadership styles in order to address the needs of the modern schools. In this article, readers are presented with a useful perspective of the transformation experienced in school leadership in Kazakhstani schools. Thus, by reviewing the current body of research articles belonging to the topic, it contributes to enhance the understanding of the emerging educational leadership.

Apart from contributing to the development of knowledge about educational leadership in the context of Kazakhstan, this article is also useful for enhancing the existing and future scholarly projects addressing the specificities of initiating and stabilizing effective leadership practices in education. This is very important bearing in mind that the country is still in the process of Educational System reforms and is in a constant effort of trying to better its Educational System to

match the international standards.

## Materials and methods

Examining the various leadership styles employed by school directors in Kazakhstan and their impact on school effectiveness, this study conducts a thorough literature review. Our study aimed to uncover common leadership practices and explore their relationship to local academic goals and international standards.

There is also research on academic databases including Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, and ERIC. School leadership in Kazakhstan, educational leadership, the effectiveness of school leaders, and leadership impact on school performance were its areas of interest. The year of publication was limited to the year 2000 to the year 2023 to focus on the present and most significant development on educational leadership in Kazakhstan. The review was based upon a large number of publications such as peer reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, doctoral theses and crucial government reports in Kazakh, English and Russian. Thus, we excluded editorials, opinion pieces, and any studies which did not mention the Kazakhstani context.

The data extraction process was conducted meticulously to guarantee the comprehensive collection of all relevant information about the study context, methodology, leadership styles examined, and key findings. The data that was extracted was organised into tables to make it easier to compare and combine. Afterwards, a thorough analysis was carried out to uncover common themes concerning leadership styles and their impact in the educational setting of Kazakhstan.

## Appointment and position of Kazakhstani headteachers

To paint the backdrop in understanding Kazakhstan's school leadership it necessary to commence by focusing on the appointment and responsibilities of headteachers in the country. In Kazakhstan, the head of

the school is known by the title 'director', and it is by this title that authors refer to the head of the school as well. According to the latest 'Teaching and Learning International Survey' (TALIS) of the OECD, the average age of directors in Kazakhstan is 48. This is slightly lower than the age of directors in the other OECD countries and economies which participated in TALIS-2018, and that has a median age of 52 years old. Besides, the above-mentioned material of the study identified that only 5% of directors in Kazakhstan are 60 years old or above, which departs from an average of 20% in other countries [1].

Kazakhstan's school system has a strong centralised governance, with education organisations following a hierarchical structure [2]. The function of a school director is, being his nature that any public employee, very regulated in its performance by guidelines prepared at the governmental level. And they are answerable to the regional education supervisors. Applicants must have an educational degree, a valid teaching credential and at least five years of classroom experience in order to be eligible for the job. Such experience shall consist of at least one year in the previous five years performing teaching as defined by law and at least 1 year acting in an administrative capacity. Prospective candidates must also possess in-depth knowledge of several areas: pedagogy, psychology, the Constitution and labor market legislation law, educational laws, legal standing for teachers and anti-corruption law.

The selecting procedure is extensive and involves five distinct stages. In addition to ensuring that it follows state educational regulations, the school director is responsible for managing the school's daily activities and promoting a positive and healthy work environment for instructors, staff, and students. The individuals in question possess the authority to represent the institution, provide guidance, make critical administrative choices, establish obligations, and sign their signature on official documents on behalf of the school. Furthermore, they guarantee the selection of appropriate staff, oversee safety, security, and well-being issues, and main-

tain the condition of the school's buildings [3; 4].

Directors are responsible for managing routine administrative tasks, which can be quite demanding due to the need for frequent checks, inspections, documentation, and enquiries from various local government departments that are related to education, culture, and sports [5]. These criteria emphasise that many of the director's responsibilities revolve around fulfilling state requirements rather than focussing on strategic leadership within the school.

## **Results and discussion**

### **School leadership in Kazakhstan**

According to Nurmukhanova [4], school leadership in Kazakhstan is a relatively new concept when compared to school administration or management. When analysing school leadership materials in Kazakhstan, it becomes apparent that there is a lack of research on leadership concepts. This highlights the need for further analysis to establish a comprehensive conceptual framework.

In Kazakhstan, the position and qualifications of school directors are generally more streamlined compared to those in western countries. Mukhtarova and Medeni [3] state that there is a growing movement to modernise school leadership in certain urban schools. Progress is being made in the development of a Western school leadership culture.

The relationship between the organisational system and school leadership is crucial. In Kazakh schools, directors typically have four deputies who oversee various areas such as teaching, educational work, innovation and development, and maintenance work. It is possible to increase the number of deputies.

Below the rank of Deputy Director, the middle management the committee leaders from the Subject Methodological Units (SMU). These subject teachers work together to develop ideas and guidelines for implementing the curriculum in various subject

areas. Their aim is to improve student performance and provide guidance. In most cases, the individual chosen to lead the Methodological Unit is a qualified instructor appointed by the director [5; 6].

In addition, schools often have Boards of Trustees, although their structure may differ from the typical administrative councils found in countries like the United Kingdom. In Kazakhstan, the Boards lack the authority to make strategic financial decisions and rely on a limited amount of sponsorship and funding. They fail to promote shared responsibility or collaborative decision-making, and they do not relieve the director of financial obligations [1].

The School Pedagogical Council (SPC) is one of the significant structural divisions of the school. The SPC serves as the primary governing body of the school, responsible for making important decisions. Teachers in Kazakhstan play a crucial role in the school decision-making process through their participation in the SPC. The emphasis on collegiality highlights the shared responsibility for making decisions that align with a common goal. According to Ayubayeva [6], there is room for debate regarding the idea that teachers can participate in school-wide decision making.

The overall situation is such that the director has a restricted amount of space to drive organisational performance. Indeed, a strict set of regulations outlines the procedures within the organisation and limits the scope of the initiative.

### **Professional development as a key factor for leadership**

Kazakhstan started the process of education reform from the year 2000 with an aim of making it more conformative to the international standards. This reform initiative involved working closely with renowned scholars from Britain and the United States. The major changes in secondary education have led to the modernisation of the system. This includes the adoption of new curriculum, improvements in student assessment,

trilingual instruction, and a 12-year model of schooling [4; 6]. Nevertheless, these reforms have failed to address the urgent demand for nationwide, all-encompassing changes in school leadership. The paper contends that the existing school leadership training system relies on upgrading courses, which is unlikely to provide a competent group of educational leaders. The courses being updated will certainly not enhance leadership abilities. On the contrary, more profound and substantial modifications are required.

Multiple research and papers have highlighted the need of developing strong educational leadership in Kazakhstan, promoting the idea of granting more autonomy to school directors in order to effectively address the needs of contemporary education. For example, Frost et al. [5], Yakavets et al. [2], and reports from policy actors and consultants such as OECD and World Bank have all highlighted these points.

Efforts are underway in Kazakhstan to enhance the abilities and enhance the practical expertise of teachers and leaders [7]. Leadership concepts are widely disseminated in the country through a range of leadership courses provided by the Centre of Excellence programme (CoE) and National Professional Development Institute. These courses are designed to enhance the knowledge and skills of school administrators and teachers through in-service learning opportunities [2].

As of 2015, the leadership preparation programme of the CoE has successfully reached 1,500 leaders in all schools in Kazakhstan. Throughout the nine-month curriculum, school directors were instructed in various leadership including distributed leadership, teacher responsibility, and networking through classrooms [8].

Furthermore, the MoES has plans to coordinate professional development courses in school leadership as part of the World Bank's project "Modernisation of Secondary Education." In line with the "State Programme for the Development of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020–2025," the government has announced its

plan to initiate the “New Formation Leader Programme.” This program aims to train a fresh group of educational leaders. According to the OECD study, many school leaders have had some training in management and leadership skills. However, several administrators have only obtained formal leadership training after they have already taken on their positions. Nevertheless, it is evident that the current directors do not possess the same degree of training and support as the previous ones in this field, highlighting a flaw in the state’s approach to cultivating school leadership, as observed by Mukhtarova and Medeni [3].

The existing director training programs offer poor results due to the lack of essential assistance from leadership to school management, resulting in stagnation in school management. Mukhtarova and Medeni [3] raise concerns about the efficacy of these courses, contending that the current system fails to properly train school administrators. The lack of suitable theoretical training is one of the reasons why directors fail to provide enough assistance to school administration and become stagnant.

However, it is crucial to enhance leadership preparation in order to meet the government’s goal of granting more autonomy to school directors through per capita funds [1]. Furthermore, school directors often receive insufficient training in leadership and management, which hinders their ability to effectively lead and guide their schools through periods of change. Recognising the importance of school leadership capability, it is considered crucial for the success of reform initiatives [2].

In their study, Sarmurzin et al. [1] shed light on significant deficiencies in the professional development (PD) programmes for school leaders in the educational system of Kazakhstan. Based on interviews with several school leaders, it is evident that many of them feel unprepared for their roles. This is primarily due to the lack of comprehensive pre-service training and insufficient ongoing professional development. It is evident that the existing professional development programmes are inadequate in addressing

the changing requirements of school administrators, particularly in the areas of crisis management and digital literacy, which have been further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings highlight the importance of a comprehensive revamp of the PD framework. It is suggested that induction training be provided for new directors, along with ongoing in-service training that addresses current administrative challenges. Additionally, mentorship programmes should be established to assist emerging leaders. These measures are designed to improve the effectiveness and readiness of school principals, ensuring they have the necessary skills to handle the administrative and instructional responsibilities of their positions.

### **Model of leadership in Kazakhstan**

There are several leadership models that have been identified by Bush and Glover such as managerial, instructional, transformational, moral, authentic, distributed, teacher leadership, system, and contingent leadership [9]. Authors examine which of the above models provides a more accurate depiction of school leadership in Kazakhstan.

Identifying a leadership model in Kazakhstan can be quite challenging. With a centralised system and hierarchical structure in place, directors face limitations when it comes to choosing leadership models or organisational structures to introduce innovations. Furthermore, the heavy burden of administrative tasks, such as maintenance, recruitment, and constant reporting, prevents directors from dedicating their attention to enhancing the educational experience provided by the school [5].

### **Bringing teacher leadership to Kazakhstan**

Dr. Gulmira Qanay was the first to study and propose teacher leadership in the context of the Kazakhstan education system. She had launched a programme called “Teacher Leadership for Learning and Collaboration.” Dr. Gulmira Qanay’s action-based doctoral thesis at Cambridge University from 2016

to 2019 focused on a pilot project that she launched and directed [10]. Dr. David Frost, Gulmira Qanay's PhD supervisor, contributed to the research as a consultant for the development of the 'non-positional teacher leadership' framework. He also collaborated with the HertsCam Network to adapt and refine approaches and strategies for implementation in Kazakhstan [11].

In the early 1980s, the idea of non-positional teacher leadership emerged alongside teacher research. However, any further advancements in this area did not immediately integrate into the established practices and norms of schools. To ensure ongoing progress, teachers must cultivate the ability to influence their colleagues and strategically implement new approaches within the school.

These challenges resulted in the adoption of a teaching-focused approach for creating work and implementing the concept of teacher leadership. This was discovered to be an effective argumentative strategy that contributed to the idea that educators have the potential to drive change. However, the approach to teacher leadership in HertsCam was quite different from the typical practice in the United States, where a select few individuals are chosen and labelled as "teacher leaders" [12].

The TLK project is a three-year initiative that seeks to foster teacher leadership in mainstream schools in Kazakhstan. During the initial year of the programme, a total of 16 schools from four different towns, located far apart from each other, took part.

Dr Qanay's research is still ongoing, but initial findings indicate that teacher leadership has been perceived as highly motivating for teachers and has resulted in school improvement through the promotion of best practices and teacher-driven initiatives [11].

According to Stevenson [13] the perception of teacher leadership is often seen as bureaucratic and conservative. On the other hand, Helterbran [14, p. 363] argues that teacher leadership is still primarily discussed in academic circles and has yet to fully ma-

terialise in practice.

The concept implemented by Dr. Qanay is a commendable effort to foster leadership in Kazakhstan. However, she focuses solely on the benefits of this paradigm and does not mention any potential drawbacks. Furthermore, she discovers the importance of mentoring in teacher leadership, yet fails to mention the longstanding success of school mentoring programmes. It is worth noting that the current law "On teacher status" recognises the significance of mentoring and even provides state-funded positions for mentors.

As an education researcher, it is important to recognise the role of mentors in supporting young educators. One way mentors provide assistance is through observing lessons and providing valuable input [14]. According to a participant in a study conducted by Yakavets et al. [2], they mentioned that while theoretical knowledge is gained over a span of four years, working with children and books presents a different set of challenges. Therefore, it is crucial to provide assistance and mentorship to young teachers as they navigate their educational path in school.

In addition, Frost et al. [5] argue that directors in certain case study schools prioritise the professional development of teaching and learning, the research conducted by practitioners, and the leadership of teachers. Enhancing the technical performance of teachers is highly valued and considered a vital element in successfully implementing national education initiatives. There is evidence to suggest that teacher leadership has been established for some time, yet it has not been widely recognised as a distinct style of leadership.

### **Transformational leadership model**

According to Dr Qanay's findings, teacher leadership can only flourish through the adoption of transformational leadership. In order to enhance effectiveness and adapt to change, school leaders should wholeheartedly embrace this concept.

Despite that in Kazakhstan, the leadership model has not explicitly been characterized as transformational (since it requires reversal from some current status), but still due to such typical characteristics of centralization like strict hierarchy and multiple level bureaucracy formed as full autonomy power mechanic suggest opposite. According to Bush and Glover [9], transformational leadership emphasises the importance of prioritising the engagement and capabilities of organisational members. The transformational model is extremely rigorous as it provides a conceptual framework for school leadership that solely focusses on how leaders strive to influence school outcomes, without going into detail about the specific nature or progression of those outcomes. However, some argue that it can be seen as a means of influencing educators to conform to the leader's principles, rather than prioritising the needs of those being led [15].

According to Nurmukhanova [4], the main role of directors in Kazakhstan is to ensure compliance with state requirements, rather than focusing on the conceptual aspects of school leadership. In a study conducted by Yakavets et al. [2], it was found that school directors in Kazakhstan tend to adopt a hierarchical approach to management, emphasising decision-making and control. They believe that schools should adhere to the "government education standard."

Ospanov [16], maintains that the term "director" implies direction and management, stating that a school director is in charge of ensuring national education policies are implemented within schools. Often, their own initiatives tend to be overlooked in many situations. From this perspective, it can be observed that Kazakh schools are operated in a manner that some may consider "autocratic," with the school director holding absolute authority. Furthermore, according to Bush and Glover [9], transformational leadership has the potential to engage all stakeholders in the pursuit of educational objectives. Directors' jobs and their schools are evaluated based on the academic achievement of students and the success of teachers in Kazakhstan [5]. This can be described as instructional leadership.

In addition, although directors may have limitations in their decision-making and strategy, they play a crucial role in fostering a positive school climate, which is highly important in achieving the overall objective. According to Yakavets et al. [2, p. 13], participants in the research emphasised the importance of principals in providing guidance to teachers for their professional development. The study has shown that the approaches used by school leaders of Kazakhstan to improve classroom efficiency differ substantially. Crucially, each has embraced teacher learning and curriculum coherence as key dimensions of good leadership.

## Conclusions

It can be stated that school leaders in Kazakhstan are exploring innovative practices and strategies for leading schools during a time of ongoing changes in the education system. Therefore, there are gradual efforts being made to foster a school leadership culture that resembles that of Western-style education. There are various potential paths for the future of school leadership development in Kazakhstan. Research findings from various countries, including the UK, USA, Australia, China, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, indicate that successful leaders tend to utilise a similar set of fundamental leadership practices. By delving into the realm of educational leadership, individuals aspiring to become leaders can improve their leadership practices and strategies, potentially preventing failures and mistakes along the way. However, all of the practices are merely suggestions and guidelines. School directors can vary, and the effectiveness of a particular approach may be influenced by various factors, including human elements and the specific circumstances. It is important to consider the specific context when applying educational practices. Therefore, a competent leader understands and values the importance of the surrounding circumstances.

Given the recent reform in education and the implementation of main voting processes, it is crucial for directors to adapt their leadership actions. This is because their power has

significantly diminished in today's improved cultural, political, and educational climate. According to Lee and Kuo [17], maintaining traditional leadership models can lead to a decrease in leadership efficacy and hinder the achievement of educational goals in schools.

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## Қазақстандағы білім берудің көшбасшылық модельдерін зерттеу

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**Аңдатпа.** Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – Қазақстандағы көшбасшылар арасында жиі қолданылатын көшбасшылық стильдерін анықтау және мектеп көшбасшылығы бойынша заманауи тәсілдерге қатысты мәліметтерді қамтитын әдеби шолу ұсы-



ну. Зерттеудің негізгі бағыты – Қазақстандағы мектеп көшбасшылығы және ондағы қолданылатын тәсілдер. Қазақстандағы көшбасшылық білім беру – елдің білім беру саласындағы ең перспективалы жаңа бағыттардың бірі. Зерттеу Қазақстандағы мектеп көшбасшылығы белгілі бір стильге сай келмейтінін мойындағанымен, оны трансформациялық деп сипаттауға болатынын ұсынады. Бұл зерттеулердің шолу нәтижесінде оқырмандар тақырып бойынша қазіргі білім деңгейін жақсы түсініп, әрі қарай зерттеу қажет бағыттарды анықтай алады. Қазақстандағы білім беру көшбасшылығы бойынша ақпараттық вакуум бар сияқты. Қазақстан мектептерінің директорлары көшбасшылық стильдерінің әртүрлі түрлерін қолданады, және бұл зерттеу көшбасшылық стильдерін жүйелі әдеби шолу арқылы зерттейді. Біздің зерттеуіміз көшбасшылықтың типтік стильдерін анықтауға және олардың аймақтық және халықаралық білім беру мақсаттары мен стандарттарымен байланысын талдауға бағытталған. Бұл тәсіл ақпараттық вакуумды толтырып, Қазақстандағы мектеп көшбасшылығына арналған күшті және қолданбалы негіз құруға көмектесуге бағытталған.


 **Түйінді сөздер:** білім беру көшбасшылығы, мектеп директорлары, көшбасшылар, кәсіби даму, орта білім


## Изучение моделей образовательного лидерства в Казахстане

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 **Аннотация.** Целью данного исследования является определение стилей лидерства, которые наиболее часто применяются среди лидеров в Казахстане, а также предоставление литературного обзора с данными о современных подходах к школьному лидерству. Основное внимание в исследовании уделено лидерству в школах Казахстана и применяемым подходам. Лидерство в образовании в Казахстане – это одна из самых перспективных новых областей в образовательной системе страны. В исследовании признается, что подход к школьному лидерству в Казахстане не соответствует какому-либо одному стилю, но предполагается, что его можно охарактеризовать как трансформационное. Благодаря данному обзору последних исследований читатели смогут лучше понять текущий уровень знаний по теме и определить области, требующие дальнейшего изучения. По поводу лидерства в образовании в Казахстане существует значительный информационный вакуум. Директора школ в Казахстане применяют различные стили лидерства, и в данном исследовании анализируется стиль лидерства через систематический литературный обзор. Исследование направлено на выявление типичных стилей лидерства и анализ их связи с региональными и международными образовательными целями и стандартами. Этот подход призван заполнить информационный вакуум и содействовать созданию более сильной и актуальной основы для школьного лидерства в Казахстане.

 **Ключевые слова:** образовательное лидерство, директора школ, лидеры, профессиональное развитие, среднее образование

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